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CHALLENGE 62

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming US \$3.50

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Into the Gap

Greg Videll

TWILIGHT: 2000™

Spectres in the Sky

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About the Cover

Nick Smith overwhelms us with his cyberpunk painting: "Rezz Balder—'CyberBuddha.'"

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The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

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Thaneet's face had taken on an expression of profound sadness. "Alas, I must seek another master. For if you go to that place, you will certainly die!"

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By Roman J. Andron



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FROM THE MANAGEMENT

Last year, Lester Smith and Steve Bryant wrote editorials about how to land a job or obtain work from a game company. I have a third approach, and I would like to share it.

All game companies are technically publishers, like the newspapers and magazines you see every day. Besides writers and editors, they also have supporting personnel: proofreaders and typesetters.

Proofreaders check the accuracy of the writing. These people are the publisher's last line of defense for checking grammar, spellings, facts, consistency with the publication's style, and material that could incite a lawsuit.

Becoming a proofreader requires as much effort as becoming a writer. Getting started, however, is easier. Read. Read everything and anything you can get your hands on. Read what you like, but also read some things you wouldn't normally read. Look for errors. Think about how you would correct those errors you find. Use the dictionary a lot and check out stylebooks from your local library. But also read for enjoyment and information. That will make you more knowledgeable.

Typesetters handle the layout of a publication. Not all publishers have these, but most game companies do. Through the use of a computer, the typesetter places the text and illustration holes in the appropriate areas.

Due to the personal computer revolution of the 1980s, typesetting equipment is much easier and more accessible to use today. If you have access to this equipment, the next thing to do is simple. Practice. Practice laying out newsletters, résumés, brochures, wedding invitations, and anything else you can think of. Look at other publications for ideas on creating your own layout. Don't be afraid to experiment.

Over time, your proofreading or typesetting skills will improve, and when you have a job interview with a publisher (or a game company), your résumé and portfolio will be stronger and you will have a skill many companies want.

Steve Maggi

WHAT'S THE POINT?

I note with interest Lester W. Smith's editorial in **Challenge 53** (Smith's reaction to a review of *Star Wars* which stated that since the PCs can never really win, there's no point in playing.).

I must confess to some sympathy with the reviewer mentioned.

As Mr. Smith says, what game you prefer depends on why you game. In order for a game to work, one of the things normally needed is a consistent game background with which the players are happy. By and large, the games mentioned (*Star Wars*, *Dark Conspiracy* and *Call of Cthulhu*) have this (though I haven't seen that much material about *Dark Conspiracy* yet—my referee won't let me buy the game book).

However, I can see the point I think the reviewer was trying to make, particularly with *Call of Cthulhu*. The background and general game spirit are so...depressing. I only play it when the rest of our group wants to play it—it's not one I would pick to play. I have no quarrel with the game mechanics or anything of that type. I just find that I'd rather play something else. This is, I think, the point the reviewer was trying to make, though judging by Mr. Smith's words, he may have put it a bit strongly.

In short, it does not matter, to quote Mr. Smith, if a game is "extremely easy to play and is incredibly easy to run." The players must also be attracted to the game concept and universe, or the game will fail. The reviewer concerned was put off enough by the setting in *Star Wars* that, for him, the game failed. This is one of the reasons why I much prefer *MegaTraveller* to the games mentioned and to those of the cyberpunk genre.

I must congratulate you on the continuing high standard of your magazine, particularly the interior and cover art. I'm one of those still reading from the *JTAS*, and my primary interest is *MegaTraveller*. However, it is not the only game I play, and there is always something I can use in some fashion in each issue. Sometimes with considerable alteration, but there is always something.

Stephen Goodfellow
Scotland

ENCOURAGING WORDS

I just read the editorial in **Challenge 54** on writing in the adventure gaming field. My congratulations on an inspired piece of writing. I wish that every game magazine would take the time to encourage their readers to submit articles or ideas.

In the 14 years I have participated in the hobby, GDW has been the only source of encouragement to neophytes to become actively involved in the hobby (I seem to recall an interview with Marc Miller in an old copy of *High Passage*, as well).

Once again, keep up the great work and the traditions of the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society**.

Allen Ray Garbee
Oxford, OH

MILITARY AND HORROR FAN

I just picked up *Twilight Nightmares*, and WOW! I love it! Great! Will there be a "Twilight Nightmares II"? How about a time-travel adventure? And I can't wait to get my hands on a copy of the *Merc: 2000 Gazetteer*. By the way, the *Heavy Weapons Handbook* is great, but I haven't got a chance to look over the *Nautical/Aviation Handbook*.

Our shops around here aren't big on GDW games. We have a Waldenbooks and a comics shop that stock games in town. Waldenbooks just the other week put GDW material on the shelf for the first time—*Dark Conspiracy* (which, by the way, looks terrific!).

All the rage in our small gaming community is *Shadowrun*. Yeah, it's good, but it doesn't hold a candle to any of your games. I confess, I've been running a campaign of it for the last eight months, but no more.

I'm a military and horror fan, and I'm moving on to *Merc: 2000*. I ran one game of it back in May, and it was great. I really like the alternate timeline for *Twilight*, and it is much more believable considering the direction our world is heading.

You are doing an excellent job of keeping RPGs an exciting pastime. Please, continue producing such quality products.

R. Alan Donahue
Hot Springs, AR

WRITERS GET READY!

CHALLENGE™ has a contest for you!

Rules

Write a unique **Twilight: 2000** (2nd ed.) or **Merc: 2000** adventure set in the Pacific or Asia.

Enter as many times as you like. Each entry should be less than 3000 words in length and include one or two maps. Entries must be typed, double-spaced, on standard-sized white or off-white paper. Staple each submission separately. The first page must contain the author's name, address and social security number, as well as the title of the article and the game it refers to (**Twilight** or **Merc**).

All manuscripts become the property of GDW and cannot be returned. GDW is not responsible for articles lost in the mail.

Judging

Entries will be judged on creativity, content, organization/writing style and feasibility within the gaming universe.

Prizes

Winners will receive a copy of every **Twilight** product GDW publishes in 1993, plus a one-year subscription to **Challenge** magazine. Also, winning entries will be featured in upcoming issues of **Challenge**.

Deadline


All entries must be postmarked by October 1, 1992. Send entries to Adventure Contest, **Challenge** Managing Editor, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646, USA.



SPECTRES

in the sky





Down to our last ammo, we were pinned by a group of Moluccan pirates, thanks to some lousy intelligence. Just as we were preparing for the last stand, we heard music—yes, music. Way off in the distance, someone was playing the 1812 Overture!

Everything stood still for a minute—even the pirates stopped firing. Then it seemed like a volcano erupted. All around us, the jungle was drenched in the heaviest gunfire I've ever seen in 20 years of military service. In about two minutes, every single pirate was dead.

Afterward, I caught a glimpse of a large plane through the jungle canopy. Looked like a C-130 transport. It was then that I realized Armageddon Airlines had saved us.

A new mercenary unit formed in the year 1997. By 2000, it has become one of the most feared merc groups in the world—and one of the few remaining air units. It's known as Armageddon Airlines (AA). This merc unit promises mass death and destruction in the blackness of the night sky. So far, it has kept good on that promise.

By Robert James Christensen

HISTORY

The story told of the founding of Armageddon Airlines is one of trickery and deceit:

As part of the USAF Special Forces based at Hurler Field, Florida, the 16th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) of the Special Operations Wing (SOW) flew the AC-130U Spectre gunship. When first deployed in Vietnam, the Spectre quickly became the main destroyer of North Vietnamese convoys along the Ho Cho Minh Trail. By the time the SOW was formed in the early 1980s, the Spectre had evolved into a heavily armed bird, crammed with sophisticated electronics and vision systems. Covert operations included missions in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Colombia, but the first publicized action was the destruction of Panamanian despot Manuel Noriega's headquarters during the invasion of Panama.

Following that mission, the unit first began its "pirate" look, with skull pin-decorated black berets, goofy nose art and cockpit stereo systems.

The 16th SOS came into maturity with action in Desert Storm in the Middle East, where it utterly destroyed artillery positions, supply convoys and, finally, the fleeing Iraqi troops along the Basra Road. Seventeen distinguished Flying Crosses and one Silver Star were awarded to crewmembers. All this was soon forgotten, however, and the unit faced disbandment in 1997. At least until the "accident."

The CO of the 16th, Col. Gary Cunningham, was not about to turn his beloved 130s over to the scrapyards. And his exec and flight engineer, Major Max Distaans, was not looking forward to unemployment. So along with 50 of their men, they conspired to save at least two of the planes for "more appropriate" purposes.

On September 17, 1997, two planes, Eve of Destruction and Bad to the Bone, were on a routine training flight over the Gulf of Mexico when garbled radio messages of "chest pains" and "look out!" were the last things heard from the planes. The next morning, the coast guard found an injured Sgt. Tony Angello among floating fuel and debris. He reported that Bad went out of control and smashed into Eve, both planes crashing into the sea. Of 26 crewmembers, he was the only one to get out alive. A mass funeral held for the lost crew was attended by President Tanner, a Saudi prince and 100 airmen.

In reality, the two planes flew to Belize to take up the mercenary cause, with Angello volunteering to be dumped in the ocean. But Cunningham and his men became trapped in their own conspiracy when the 16th was not disbanded after all! After a month of painful reevaluation, additional air force personnel and several family members arrived in Belize. Under the command of Cunningham and Distaans, with Major Alvin Nagle in charge of finances, a mercenary air company was formed, and Armageddon Airlines was in business.

Or so the story goes. Of course, this is the version for public consumption, "public" meaning the merc grapevine. What really happened is that Armageddon Airlines was formed with the complete cooperation of the USAF and CIA in order to give the United States a deniable means of supporting covert missions around the world. AA often takes on non-US clients to keep up appearances, but no mission is flown that acts against American interests.

IN ACTION

Named after a C-130 transport Distaans once flew aboard, Armageddon Airlines provides its patrons with extended air patrol, close air support, and search-and-destroy missions. Due to high costs involved with aviation fuel and ammunition, the hiring price is very high—\$1 million a week, give or take donated fuel or ammo. The two gunships and their flight crews are extremely efficient and have quickly earned an acclaimed reputation for themselves as "death from the night sky." Now, the word of an appearance by the Spectres instantly panics those military and insurgent groups unfortunate to be on the receiving end of Armageddon Airlines.

Missions: In the first year of operation, AA is reported to have taken on counterinsurgent missions for the El Salvadoran, Peruvian and Venezuelan governments, and even an American billionaire reportedly hired them to take out several of the Colombian drug lords' jungle estates. The unit has more recently relocated to Bathurst Island on the northern coast of Australia for work in the Indonesian and Philippine civil wars, being hired by Australia and Hong Kong in 1998, and by Manila in for two months in 1999. Most of the missions flown are either ground support, or search and

destroy. One of the more odd jobs is to insert commandoes into heavily defended areas, using the AC-130Us' advanced ECM systems to avoid detection. The current job for the Australians is attacking Indonesian rebel camps on Sumatra and in the Moluccas, as well as hunting down pirate groups.

AA has refused to attack heavily populated civilian areas. A patron supposedly once dismissed AA for that reason, but rehired the group a week later.

Tactics and Strategy: The U version of the Spectre now has six battle management operators (the new term for gunners), a fire control officer and just two loaders, as well as the four-person flight crew.

The AC-130U is a fairly new version of a Vietnam-era gunship, being delivered in 1992 with more advanced electronic, vision and fire-control systems than the H model. It is a night-flying plane, using its inherent infrared and night vision gear to pick out targets while circling above. The computer-enhanced night vision systems have a resolution of 0.5 meters from an altitude of 15,000 feet in total darkness. Lasers are used to lock on up to 12 targets for the desired guns. Day attacks are conducted only for poor weather, offensives and ocean patrols.

The AC-130Us are equipped with electronic jamming gear, but this is only used if the opposition has radar-guided AAA or missiles. An infrared decoy system handily deals with man-portable missiles such as Stingers and SA-7s. Flying overhead with muffled engines, the first evidence of the Spectres is the whirring sound of the Gatling guns and the thump of the cannons.

A favorite tactic of AA is to sneak up on an enemy camp and begin blaring out music via four large, outdoor speakers. *Die Walküre*, *Night on Bald Mountain*, *1812 Overture* and old Van Halen tunes are favorites.

Another tactic uses forward-facing M2HBs and rockets for frontal attacks on pirate shipping, although this is usually a chance occurrence.

Life of a Merc: Surprisingly, Armageddon Airlines has rapidly become a very family-oriented business. Some of the original personnel brought their wives and children to Belize, then to Australia, where the unit has set up a Gypsy camp-type home of tents and prefab buildings. Family members now provide skills in maintenance, business

and education, as well as housekeeping. Homecrafts such as weaving, gardening, beekeeping and fishing keep the family members busy and well-stocked with food, although many foodstuffs are bought in from Darwin. Cunningham's 15-year-old son, Derek, is starting to fly alongside his father, while the Dristaans handle flight engineering and navigation together. The life-style of this extended clan is slightly Spartan due to the location, but morale is very high.

Armageddon Airlines now has 61 aircrew and maintenance personnel, and 97 dependents.

EQUIPMENT

The main air assets in the Armageddon Airlines inventory are, of course, the pair of AC-130Us. But the group's resources also include a 33-year-old Gokker F.27-500 *Friendship* cargo plane (nicknamed *Bullwinkle*), used for transporting personnel and supplies, and a 28-year-old Grumman *Gulfstream I* (*Rocky*), recently added as a business plane.

Both *Spectres* have two GAU-2B miniguns, two 25mm and 40mm autocannons, and a 105mm howitzer. The *Spectre's* top speed is 602 kph, with a cruising speed of 556 kph. Range is 7900 kilometers. The AC-130U was the first USAF plane to use light-weight ceramic armor on critical areas like fuel and control lines, ammo boxes, and crew spaces. AA recently purchased more miniguns and is in the process of installing them. Each plane has been modified by sheet metal spaced armor on the port firing side, plus a S-55/32 rocket launcher and a fixed twin M2HB pod (500 rounds) on the starboard wing. *Bullwinkle* has a top speed of 480 kph and a range of 3500 km, with two 300kg drop tanks. It can carry up to 56 passengers, five tons of supplies or 6000 liters of aviation fuel. *Rocky* has a speed of 560 kph and range of 4088 km, and can take 24 passengers or 2500 kg of supplies.

Personnel Arms: Small arms consist of 9mm pistols and Uzis for the aircrews, and a mix of pistols, AUG Steyr and FN-FNC assault rifles for personnel on the ground. Four captured PK machineguns waiting to be installed in the *Gulfstream* can be used in a dire emergency, although only 320 rounds are available.

Vehicles: The group has five pick-up trucks of various makes and three Land Rovers, along with two forklifts for personal and base use.

Homemade alcohol is used as vehicle fuel to save money. The prize wheels are two Commando Scout cars (armed with M2HBs), used for patrolling the base perimeter.

OPTIONS FOR MERC: 2000

While the reasons for teaming up **Merc: 2000** players and Armageddon Airlines aren't too clear at first glance, the two can be incorporated. Besides, just being associated with AA would do wonders for a team's renown.

Transportation: While the main mission of the 16th SOS was aerial firepower, another was to drop off small units of special forces behind enemy lines. PCs could subcontract air transport alone for twice typical air rates, due to the AC-130U's superb night-flying ability. Up to 10 characters can be seated on the relief deck (under the flight deck) and jump via the rear exit doors. A patron could also hire AA outright as transport and close air support for the team.

Security Forces: The airline's main base in Australia could come under threat of attack by pirates or Indonesian insurgents, and the gunships are not too effective on the ground. The rescue of kidnapped family members is another possibility. AA could hire the PCs as rescuers, backup security forces or a training cadre for its own security personnel.

Commando Attack: The PCs could be hired to attack the base by the groups AA is fighting against. The PCs would have to reach the base, neutralize any armed personnel and blow up the *Spectres* on the ground. Of course, this would make the players traitors in the eyes of the US government and turncoats in the eyes of some fellow mercs.

OPTIONS FOR TWILIGHT: 2000

If WWII had broken out, there would be no Armageddon Airlines, but the 16th SOS would find itself in a similar situation. The most likely areas of operation for any remaining *Spectres* would be either the Middle East or the western United States. Since the 16th performed so well in Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and since oil is

available there, attachment to the 6th Air Cavalry Brigade would be a logical choice.

A more mercenary approach would have the two *Spectres* fighting for Israel or one of the minor gulf kingdoms.

In the case of the US, Texas, California and Alaska present the best areas for locating the squadron, due to the availability of oil, aerospace industries (spare parts) and invading enemy forces.

Although families would have been left behind in Florida (the site of the nuclear strike on Eglin AFB), the female military NPCs would be included, while the additional aircraft, vehicles and non-USAF personnel would not. The biggest problem facing the unit in a **Twilight: 2000** scenario would be the availability of fuel and ammo, which would force reducing the unit down to the two planes named above. But with heavy aerial firepower, the surviving *Spectre* gunships would still find themselves as a much-sought-after military unit, both by allies and enemies.

MAJOR NPCS

Col. Gary Cunningham: The former CO of the US 16th Special Operations Squadron, Cunningham is now the leader of Armageddon Airlines. He was a top AF ROTC cadet at Stanford. After graduating with a degree in political science in 1977, he entered flight school and ended up flying the C-130, which he fell in love with. He saw transport duty in Europe, Africa and Asia before being selected for special forces. A non-chalant officer, he allowed the rather odd behavior of his men, which included the music, odd plane names and nose art, and unofficial emblems (pirate flags, black berets and skull pins). The silliness quickly turned to cool professionalism in Panama and Iraq, when Cunningham's crew rescued a fellow *Spectre* crew and later destroyed a fleeing Iraqi convoy. His love of flying is equaled only by the devotion to his comrades and their families. He has an English wife, Jacqueline, and three children—Derek (15), Ben (12) and Sally (10).

He has a Pilot skill of 6.

Max and Kathleen Dristaans: Max Dristaans, age 36, first enlisted in the Air Force Reserve at age 17. He went regular after dropping out of college and began his career with the Herc as a mechanic/loadmaster for the Tactical Airlift Command. His first taste of combat came in Grenada with the 82nd

Airborne. He attended NC State, got a degree in mechanical engineering in 1987 and breezed through OTS. While at flight survival school that year, he met brand-new 2nd Lt. Kathleen MacGuire. She was a Texas-born army brat from Ft. Hood who had studied math at Texas A&M and was training to be a navigator. The pair became fast friends but lost touch when reassigned. Max found a home with the 16th SOS, showing off his talent with the "Herky Birds." While at the Eglin PX, he happened to bump into Kathleen. She had driven over from Tyndall AFB, where her E-3 AWACS squadron had been sent. The two fell in love and were married in 1989, five months before Max went off to blast Manuel Noriega. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, Kathleen went to Saudi Arabia, and Max followed. One night, when another *Spectre* was shot down, Max and the major decided to try a rescue. For risking his life pulling crewmembers out of the burning wreck, Max received a Silver Star and promotion to captain. He and Kathleen now act as the unit's "social directors," keeping unit and family morale up. They have a 4-year-old daughter, Nausicaa.

Both have a default Pilot skill of 2.

Senior Master Sgt. Hal Williams:

Hal Williams first joined the air force as a way out of the Harlem slum he grew up in. Discovering a talent for engines, he soon found himself in Vietnam working on C-123 and C-130 engines, including the first batch of *Spectres*. Continuing to have a successful career with the USAF, he was assigned to the 1st SOW in 1979 and soon became the unit's chief mechanic. He was about to retire when the Persian Gulf War erupted and soon had him in Saudi (with the 16th Squadron). Upon retiring, he settled down in Pensacola with his wife, Esther, and opened a small machine shop. But when it failed and retirement benefits were cut, Hal was very receptive to his former CO's invitation to become a merc. Esther was one of the first family members to go along, and her sharp bookkeeping skills have contributed to AA. Hal has worked miracles with jury-rigged and hand-made aircraft parts, and he is one of the reasons AA is still flying and fighting.

He has Machinist and Mechanic skill of 7.

Capt. Dan Briddles: The soft-spoken pilot of *Bad to the Bone*, Briddles is an avid fly-fisherman and blues harp player, as well as cracker-jack pilot. His wife, Janet, is a folk artist who leads the craft workshops for the family members.

He has a Pilot skill of 5.

Major Alvin Nagle: The chief financial officer of AA, with an MBA from Harvard, Nagle was the former logistics officer of the 1st SOW. He keeps AA quite profitable with his managerial style.

He also pilots the *Gulfstream*, and he has a Pilot skill of 4.

Captain Christina Shaw: A former USAF aviation instructor turned airline pilot, Shaw left American Airlines to join up with her old academy buddy, Nagle, to finally fly combat missions. She takes turns as pilot, copilot and

navigator on each of AA's aircraft.

She has a Pilot skill of 5.

Lt. J.T. Carpenter: Briddles' copilot is a wild pilot and would-be comedian who conspired with Max to make a "Desert Shield Follies" comedy video tape (a big hit with the troops). He is living with a local Australian girl.

He has a Pilot skill of 4.

WO3 John Amick: The odd army man in the unit who joined up in El Salvador, Amick is responsible for keeping the ammo dump safe and well stocked, as well as the general supply depot.

He is a master scrounger and loves foreign military gear.

Lt. Dave Servill: Servill is the co-pilot of *Eve of Destruction* when Cunningham isn't giving flying lessons to Derek. He is also the pilot of *Bullwinkle* when it's time to pack up or pick up fuel and supplies in Darwin.

He has a Pilot skill of 5.

WO2 Al Bunochelli: *Eve's* burly fire control officer, Bunochelli has an uncanny knack for finding hidden targets no one else can spot, even with electronic night sights. He is also the group's best cook. He and his wife, Gaye, have four children, ages 13, 11, 9 and 7.

MSgt. Roy Berry: Crippled due to his injuries in the *Spectre* crash in Saudi Arabia, he has devoted his former talents as a fire control officer to AA, partly out of respect for Max Dristaans, who saved him from a fiery death. He and wife, Alice, have two teenage sons.

TSgt. Beth Parsons: She is the unit's chief flight controller and electronics expert. Her husband, John, a gunner, died in 1996, leaving her with two children, a boy and a girl ages 8 and 6.

Sgt. Tony Angello: Nicknamed "Flipper" for his intentional dunking in the gulf, Angello is still a crack gunsmith and loader, as well as a great shot with an assault rifle.

Sgt. Steffie Garanzola: A tomboyish southern girl of 26 who is an ace with an aircraft engine and enjoys hunting with her 30.06. She also commands a Commando Scout car.

Sgt. Richie Thompson: A top-notch gunner on *Eve* and an equally talented machinist, he is secretly romantic with Sgt. Garanzola.

Jacko McDougal: The sole Australian member of AA (and at 59, the oldest), McDougal is responsible for base security. Ω

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The following adventure is designed for a small mercenary group, preferably consisting of three to eight PCs. The text is written for **Merc: 2000**, but it can be easily transposed to **Dark Conspiracy** as an opportunity for the normally outgunned PCs to have a chance to kick some can with confidence for a change. The adventure can be set in whichever city the PCs happen to be in or near at the time.

PATRON

The mercenaries are contacted discretely, via third-party emissaries. The first message comes through a trusted contact

RESTRICTED ACCESS

When the mercs can get it to a computer, the disk reveals the following information:

>TERMS OF CONTRACT: Complete task mentioned below within 48 standard terrestrial hours of agreement to contract. Remuneration will be made in the form of a special account set up with Banke Suisse, #9812-J, to total \$10,000 American per contractee. The account will contain \$1000 American per contractee, as a standard retainer fee, once contract is accepted.

>REQUIRED ACTIVITY: Destruction of top floor of

THINGS GOT

By Craig Sheeley

WEILADDER

or agent, someone the mercs have dealt with before. The memo is enigmatic and laconic: "Someone is interested in your services. Please submit a way of reaching you and wait for further contacts."

The second communication comes through this message drop. It is equally laconic and to the point: "Come to the airport lobby. Bench near Boarding Ramp 2. 0330 hours, two days from now. Talk to the old man with a gray handlebar mustache. Very covert. Attract no attention."

By this time, the mercs may well be wondering what they're letting themselves in for (and if they're not wondering this or something similar, they're insufficiently paranoid for this line of work!).

The PCs can check around with their contacts and informants, but no one has a line on who's trying to deal with them or why.

At the airport lobby, security is naturally tight—after all, airports are a prime target for terrorists. Metal detectors and computer-enhanced security cameras are everywhere, scanning for concealed weapons. Treat the security forces as having a general Observation skill of 6. Airport police respond very swiftly and nastily to anyone trying to carry a weapon into their little bailiwick. SWAT teams respond, and they have no qualms about shooting first and asking questions later. Inform the players of the risks and penalties before they make a decision to try smuggling arms into the meeting.

The contact man is quite obvious—he's the only person in the place with a handlebar mustache. He's reading quietly, apparently waiting for the PCs to show up (the book is *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*). He appears to have no weaponry and no luggage. He doesn't look up as the mercs approach, and he reacts only when spoken to or when someone sits down beside him (whichever comes first). When he does speak, he addresses the PC nearest him by name, commenting on the character's punctuality (or lack thereof). He offers the closest PC a computer disk. "You'll find what you need on this," he says. "Nice doing business with you."

He then stands and takes his leave. Should the PCs desire to follow him, they're out of luck! He's boarding an airliner due out at 0350 hours, slated to go to Bermuda. There are no tickets left on that flight, and there are no other flights to Bermuda for another 12 hours.

Triangle Building. Destruction must be complete, and there must be no witnesses or bodies.

>REQUIRED EQUIPMENT AND TRANSPORT: Provided by contractees.

>SECURITY: Fully covert. Revelation of any details of the mission or the target, present or future, will result in termination of contractees.

>TIME LIMIT: Contract must be accepted or dismissed by 1200 hours this day.

>ACCEPTANCE: Dial International 000-0101 to accept. Dial International 000-1010 to decline.

Uh-huh. Several things are weird about this contact. It's way more than the standard pay. Destroying the top of an entire building is risky and bizarre. The methods of contact are definitely out of the ordinary. And that bit about "contractee termination" in the event of an information leak goes two steps beyond weird and right into ominous. Sounds like someone wants something distinctly illegal done. Like explosive murder.

MISSION BRIEFING

Should the mercs choose to accept this mission, all they have to do is get on the phone and dial International 000-0101. When they do, a recorded message sounds over the line: "Mission information access code is Octopus. Repeat, mission information access code is Octopus." The line goes dead.

Once the PCs go back to the disk and type in "Octopus," a number of files show up on the disk: Briefing, Money and Floorplan.

Briefing

The Briefing file contains the following information:

>Your mission is the destruction of the top floor of the Triangle Building. The Floorplan file contains floorplans of the building, concentrating on the top floor.

>Known security systems for this building include state-of-the-art infrared, sonic and pressure detectors. All detectors are monitored by computer, the CPU of which is located on the top floor. In addition, live guards patrol lower floors at frequent and irregular intervals. These guards are supported by a special weapons reaction



Continued on page 16.

Challenge 62 13

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team that responds in case of emergency. Available information suggests that these guards are not allowed on the top floor. It is likely that active security systems

are in charge of dealing with intruders on the top floor.
>Guards wear sidearms. Special weapons teams use military-class armament and armor.

>Specifics for structure of Triangle Building, according to filed data:

(What follows are mathematical computations. Anyone with Demolitions skill can decipher them to mean that the walls have an Armor Value of 10, and the support members have an Armor Value of 15. Doors and elevator doors have Armor Values of 3. A few quick calculations show that blowing the entire floor in the simplest fashion—by blowing the structural supports—would require 12 three-kilo charges of plastique explosives.)

>Normal business hours at the Triangle Building: 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Money

This file contains the phone number of the bank containing the retainer fee payment.

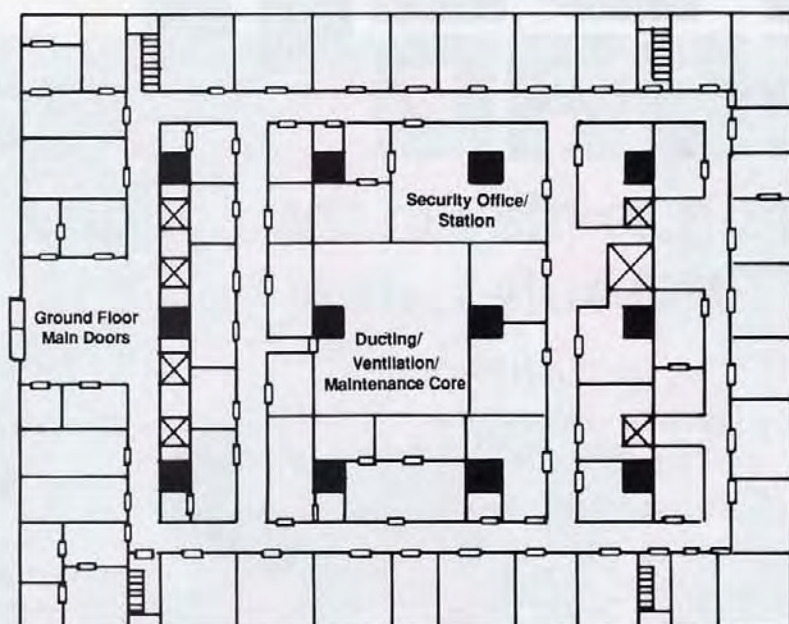
Floorplan

This file contains the floorplans to the left, which are the general building layout and the specific layout of the top floor. A note accompanying these floorplans points out that the plans are extrapolations of information filed with municipal agencies for licensing purposes, so the information may not be completely accurate.

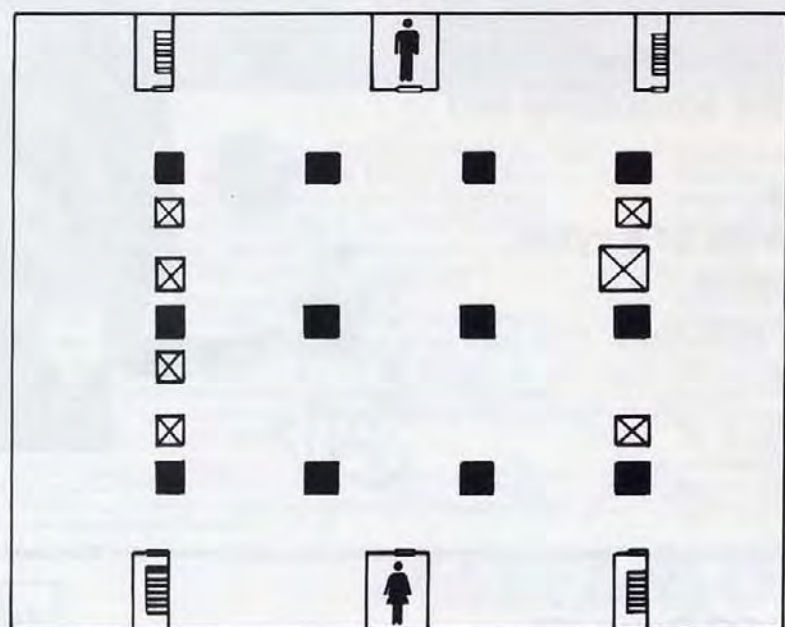
PLANNING

The mercs have 48 hours in which to complete their mission. In this time, they must plan what they want to do and acquire the equipment. The referee can have some fun with them if they're trying to find some stuff that is rare or difficult to come by. Suppliers might start asking questions, and the word may circulate on the street that someone is up to something strange.

General Layout



Top Floor



INSERTION

Getting in to the Triangle Building is a real trick. The PCs may consider a variety of alternatives.

Daytime Entry: The mercs can try to walk in, but Triangle security is quite good. Whatever the PCs try, their attempts to sneak in during business hours garner plenty of suspicion. Even if the PCs are completely unarmed and are there on legitimate business, security men and cameras follow them around, keeping an eye on them. Any PCs with large guns (weapons other than concealed sidearms) have the SWAT team called on them and are ejected from the building. If the mercs do something stupid like opening fire, the SWAT teams will return the present with interest from their larger weapons.

Breaking In: Breaking in is also difficult. All entry points, from doors to ventilation shafts and water mains, are covered by sensors. Doors are monitored by cameras and induction sensors; shafts and vents are rigged with pressure sensors and heat detectors. Even the rooms have noise sensors that monitor unusual noise in the rooms.

The upshot of this is that if one of the alarms is tripped, the security forces are advised to investigate. The noise detectors are set off by any loud noise. For each combat turn spent in one of these deserted rooms, make an Average: Stealth roll. Failure indicates that a noise alerts security.

The sensors at the vents and shafts require a successful Difficult: Electronics roll to disarm the alarms. Failure alerts security to the tampering.

The doors are even worse, due to the fact that they have multiple sensors, induction and video.

Air Approach: Approaching the Triangle Building from the air is also difficult. The building's area is a restricted aerial grid, where no traffic is allowed unless specifically cleared by the Triangle Building. And in this age of corporate savagery, any aerial intrusion into the Triangle Building's airspace would be met with armed hostility as security scrambles to the roof to deal with the problem.

Referee: Unless the PCs try some absolutely unpredictable method of getting into the Triangle Building, they are spotted. No amount of subtlety will protect them; it's as if the guards can read their minds and detect their intentions as soon as they enter the building—which is very close to the truth.

Of course, security is less likely to realize that there's trouble if the PCs try something completely unhinged (like trying to HALO a landing on top of the building, which would be Difficult: Parachute, at best, with mishaps ranging from hitting electrical aerials to missing the top of the building to smacking into the side of the building!).

WELCOMING PARTY

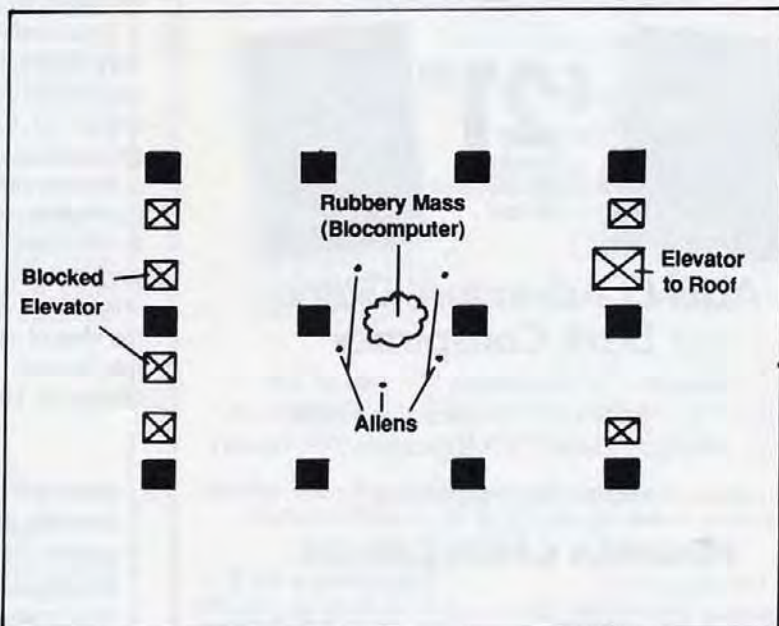
Unless the mercs do something totally unexpected, security is going to rumble onto them preemptively. If the PCs managed to gain entrance at the bottom floors of the building, this means they have a long trip ahead of them, punctu-

ated by elevators that don't work (or start to work, then drop dramatically toward the basement), steel grilles sealing off sections of the corridors, special weapons security teams popping up to order the mercs to surrender, and thick fire doors (Armor Value 3) to the stairs that lock from a remote location, completely violating fire regulations.

To make things worse, the elevators to the top floor are blocked. Completely. The elevators just will not go to the top floor (there are three elevators that pass through the top floor and communicate with the roof), and the stairs do not go to that floor either, truncating with added concrete. If the PCs manage to scale up an elevator shaft to the top floor, they find that the doors are quite heavy and tough—and locked (Armor Value 10). Indeed, even the vent shafts and water mains are blocked by heavy grates (Armor Value 4—these will have to be blown, not cut).

The security personnel at the Triangle Building are all considered Veteran NPCs, except the officers, who are Elite. The security staff members work in pairs or in five-person special weapons fire teams. The pairs are patrol staff, armed with M9 pistols with two clips, one pair of handcuffs, one concealment grenade, and individual tactical radios, which also act as transponders (although the mercs have no way of knowing this). The special weapons fire teams consist of one officer and four troopers, all with Kevlar body armor and helmets, gas masks, M9 pistols with two clips, one tear gas grenade, one concealment grenade, one "flash-bang" grenade, and individual tactical radio/transponders. In addition, three out of four troopers have either H&K MP-5 SMGs or M16A2 rifles. The other trooper has an MM-1 grenade launcher (**Heavy Weapons Handbook**, page 24). This is a 12-shot 40mm grenade launcher, nine kilograms unloaded, ROF 5) loaded with an equal mix of stun, tear gas and HE grenades. Officers retain only an M9 pistol as a sidearm.

Top Floor Actual Layout



OCTOPUS' GARDEN

Once the mercs make it to the top floor (either by fighting their way up or by inserting there), things get weirder. The entire top floor bears little resemblance to the plan the patron provided. Careful scouting reveals that the structural members supporting the roof are still there, as are the elevators. And that's all that's normal.

The rest of the top floor looks like some bizarre hydroponics experiment. The entire floor is awash in knee-deep water, the liquid thick with sludgy impurities, brackish and smelly. It does not taste at all good, should anyone try it. Wild plants clutter the space, growing up out of the water and looking like nothing so much as undersea plants growing in air instead of being submerged. Walls, placed apparently at random, look more like coral than drywall. The place is lit by spots of phosphorescence, and everything is undersea blue-green.

The mercs haven't a chance of being quiet here, since they slosh every time they take a step. In addition, the water teems with swimming things that would give deep-sea dwellers nightmares. They are not dangerous, but the creatures that slither by defy description, save by someone of H.P. Lovecraft's graphic writing talents. Give the PCs a nasty turn with a suitably horrible account of one of the grotesqueries that swims between them, and be sure to use adjectives like slimy, protuberant, pustulant, fanged, barbed, spined, rubbery, gangreous, etc.

As they push past some of the almost-tentacular foliage, one plant darts out a mess of hollow fronds and tries to sting one or more of the PCs! The plant/animal (a sort of anemone, actually) catches them off guard, and the only thing they can do is block the attacks or dodge (dodging is an Average: Agility test, and a successful dodge means the character has dived into the knee-high water). If the anemone's attacks are not avoided, it has a

1p2 paralytic poison (meaning it does 1 point of damage for penetration purposes, then does 2 dice of damage per phase to the victim's chest total for the next 12 phases). Victims whose chest hits total rise to Critical are incapacitated, paralyzed by the toxin.

Following the initial attack, the plant/animal continues to attack with a skill of 4 and an Initiative of 6. It has enough long tentacles to attack every merc within a four-meter range. It dies when hit by flame weapons (WP grenades, flamethrowers, the slug of a HAFLA, etc.) or when it receives 20 points of weapons fire damage (or 10 points of damage from edged melee weapons—a machete makes short work of this creature).

The noise of the attack awakens the denizens of the central area of the level, and they prepare a trap for the mercs who threaten them. When the PCs stumble into the central area, they find a curious collection of flesh-pink, spongy pads arrayed in a circle around a large, grotesque collection of seemingly living matter (this mound of life is actually the building computer—a living machine incorporating slices of terrestrial brains). As they slosh forward, the PCs are surprised by five gruesome creatures which appear from the water, striking from behind the mercs. Any merc succeeding at a Difficult: Observation task is not surprised in combat; otherwise, the creatures manage to attack by surprise and hit the PCs.

These creatures are slightly shorter than man-size, and they resemble great lumps of mobile, pickle-shaped, green-gray flesh sprouting tentacles and featuring fish-like eyes and mouths (referees of **Dark Conspiracy** will recognize them as tentacular ETs). These ferocious entities fight to the death, attempting to kill the mercs before the mercs can kill them.

FINISHING THE JOB

If the mercs survive the attack of the octopus-people, they can complete their demolitions job and withdraw. Getting out might be a bit of a problem, due to the fact that the security special weapons teams are now covering the roof and all exits. The PCs may well have to fight their way out, and it's likely to be a stiffer fight than the way in!

When the mercs are safe again, they find that their mysterious patron stands by the deal—they've got another \$9000 apiece in their Swiss bank account.

Once the PCs have had a chance to catch their breath, they may ask themselves exactly what happened. However, this is a dangerous question, and one they will probably never know the answer to. Should they learn the answer, their lives may be in great danger.

But the referee may want to know the story. The matter was a simple one—one corporate group wanted to wipe out another. In this case, the corporate group funding the destruction happened to be a clique of man-sized insects, bent on nipping an intrusion by hostile intruders—the tentacular ETs. They hit on the idea of using indigenous troops to do the job, and they hired the human mercenaries through twisted and untraceable channels. The ultimate in plausible deniability.

TENTACULAR ETs

Strength: 11	Education: 6	Move: 2/4/8/15
Constitution: 11	Charisma: 1	Skill/Dam: 6*/5
Agility: 5	Empathy: 4	Hits: 13/25
Intelligence: 11	Initiative: 3	

*Each attack does 1D6 attacks per action in melee combat, due to their multiple tentacles.

Special Skill: Swimming 10. Ω

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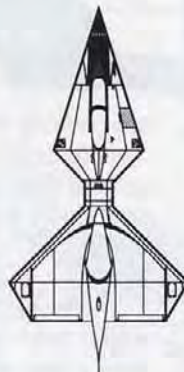
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You have been crewing a Type-T patrol ship for the Duchy of Oasis Reserve Forces (ResFor) for the past year. Oasis relies on ships like yours to keep vital trade moving despite the pirates who have come to infest the sector. The crew has served ResFor with distinction on a number of occasions in the past and, in particular, has played a critical role in the eradication of several pirate bands.

Your current assignment is to patrol the various worlds of the duchy trailing the Maw, a minivoid which forms part of the "thumb" of the Great Rift. Your ship, the Zeshliama, is now in the Hepa (2226 Zarushagar) system.

This adventure takes place sometime in 1122 in Zarushagar sector. The characters must be familiar with starship operations and possess some combat-oriented skills. Craft profiles can be found in **Imperial Encyclopedia**, except the express boat tender, which is detailed in **Hard Times**.

SETUP

The Zeshliama, named after a hero of Darmine myth, is a Type-T patrol cruiser. The characters should be assigned to crew positions based on skills held and player preference. If there aren't enough characters to fill all eight positions, NPCs can round out the crew. Crewmembers are also required to fill the position of ship's troops, as needed.

NPCs will be from merchant, system navy or colonial navy backgrounds, reflecting ResFor's general makeup. ResFor is composed of popular ground and naval units contributed by the duchy's member worlds, as well as experienced volunteers. They augment the front-line army and navy, which are just reaching full strength. The characters are assumed to be volunteers and not members of any particular world's forces. ResFor pays twice normal crew salaries plus combat bonuses in order to attract qualified volunteers.

HEPA

Hepa joined the duchy because it's a relatively minor world which relies on outside trade for nearly everything. It's never figured prominently in anybody's plans, but that doesn't mean Hepa is ignored by Duchess Victoria's government. The system is regularly visited by ResFor and navy patrols.

As of a few months ago, a starmerc contingent out of Irap (2630 Zarushagar) is now stationed in-system and consists of two Shukugan-class, 400-ton system defense boats (SDBs). The mercs' presence allows the duchy to place its fighting ships elsewhere. (Hepa trades raw materials to industrialized Irap, also a member of the duchy, in return for the protection.) Backing up the starmercs are a number of surveillance and interdiction satellites, known respectively as "survsats" and "insats." The survsats are used to detect

In addition to the Zeshliama, two other ResFor ships are in the system—the patrol tender *Birmingham*, a converted Scout Service express boat tender, and a Type-S courier, the *Poni Express*. The patrol tender fills the combined roles of tanker and floating workshop. It's in the process of refueling and refurbishing the survsats and insats in the system. The courier has just arrived bearing personal mail for those on patrol, as well as orders and information from headquarters.

Along with mail for the crew of the Zeshliama is a sealed holocrystal for the ship's captain (who is assumed to be one of the PCs). The crystal contains an intelligence summary and new orders for the patrol cruiser.

The Rolling Thunder pirate band has been striking along the spinward edge of the duchy for the last several months from its base somewhere on the other side of the Maw near Liasdi (J) subsector. Military intelligence's analysis of the attacks and possible routes into Oasis indicate that the pirates aren't going around the Maw, as would be expected.

Instead, it appears that the pirates are coming out of the Maw, which leads military intelligence to believe that Rolling Thunder has a refueling base somewhere in the minivoid.

The Zesh is ordered to stand by at Hepa and attempt to intercept any pirate ships which appear. The goal is to capture a Rolling Thunder ship, learn the

G

Locate and eliminate a pirate base in deep space.

By Greg Videll

A

INTO THE

any possible threats to Hepa, as well as to monitor local space. The insats, in orbit around the planet, are intended to discourage those threats.

AT HEPA

Things remain quiet aboard the Zesh while it holds at its assigned station. Other than a free trader yesterday, traffic had been sparse. The only activity in-system consists of the *Birmingham* going about its business.

Everyone's eagerly awaiting the latest shipment of mail from the courier that's just made orbit. It's fortunate that it caught up with you as only a few days remain before you move on to next system on your route.

P

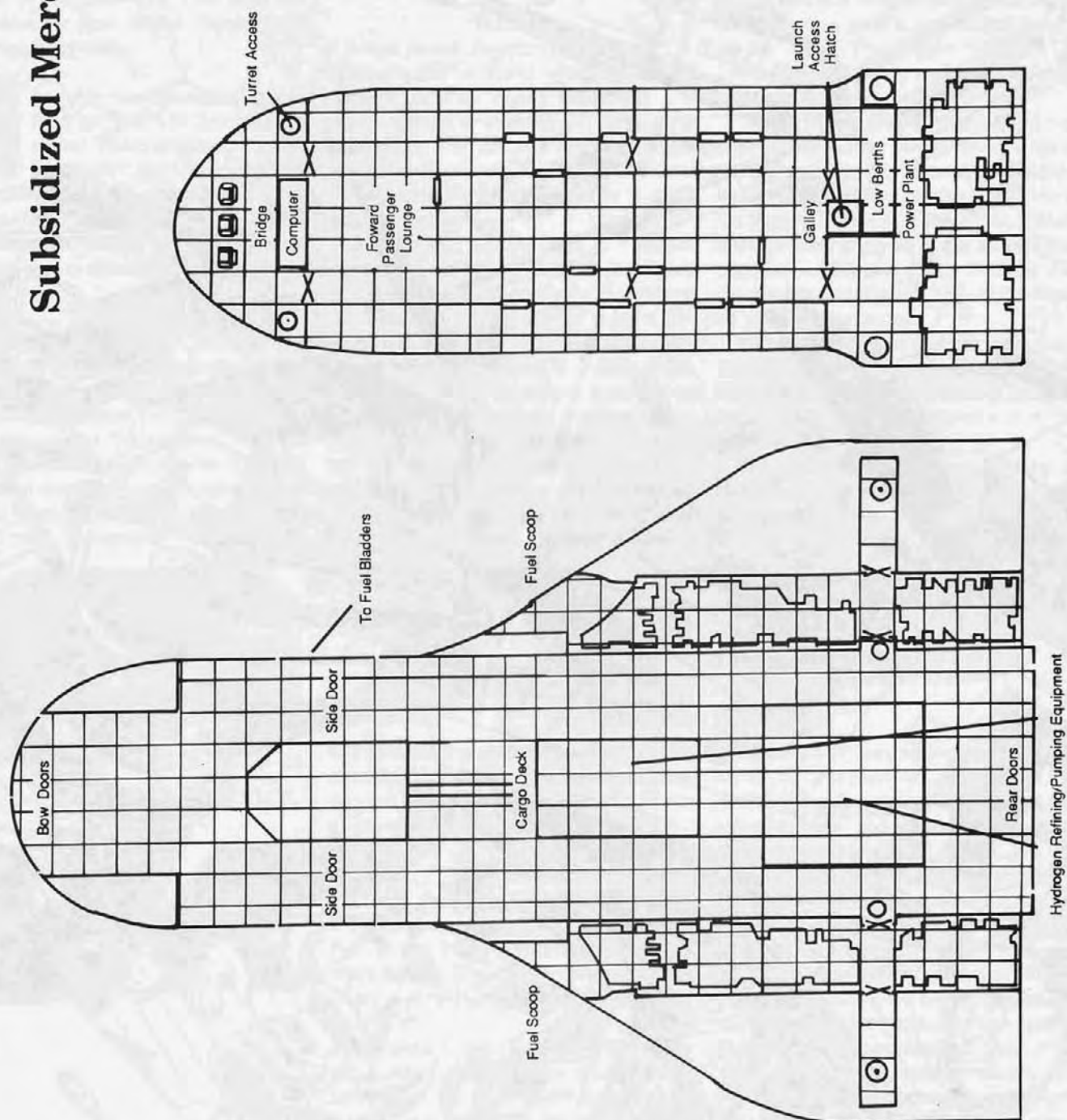
coordinates for the deep space base and await reinforcements. (Without the coordinates, there's no way to find the refueling base. The Maw is too extensive to search piecemeal.)

Once additional ships have arrived, a raid on the base will be conducted. Similar orders have been issued to ResFor ships all along the Maw.

Military intelligence notes that Rolling Thunder vessels have been consistently spotted exiting jumpspace at high speed. They fly to the nearest gas giant, then refuel and exit the system—usually before an effective pursuit can be mounted. Intel believes there's a special purpose behind the unusual exit velocity, although it's reached no firm conclusions as of yet.



Subsidized Merchant Diagram



RUN TO SHEPTA

"Passive optical array has detected a ship leaving jump," says the ship's computer in its gravelly tones. "Tentative identification indicates high probability that the ship is a corsair of the Rolling Thunder band." The computer has barely finished speaking when general quarters sounds throughout the ship. The gentle thrumming from the deck plates rises in intensity as the M-drive spools up.

Not long after the Zesh receives its instructions from headquarters, a Type-P corsair blasts out of jumpspace on a vector to the system's gas giant, Shepta. The craft is clearly marked with the Rolling Thunder band's fearsome insignia—a skull split by a lightning bolt. The characters will need to plot an intercept and get their ship moving quickly in order to catch the pirate vessel. What role, if any, the starmercs play in the chase is up to the referee. (Both the *Poni Express* and *Birmingham* will stay behind, in any case.) A race ensues to nab the corsair before it can refuel and flee out-system.

In order to heighten the drama of the adventure, the PCs close on the Type-P only a few hours after it reaches Shepta. The Rolling Thunder ship, knowing the Zesh isn't far behind, uses the cloud cover in the upper atmosphere of the gas giant in an attempt to shake off pursuit long enough to effect an escape.

HIDE AND SEEK

For a ship that can cross light-years in days and detect the most ephemeral of radiations, flying a visual search pattern at a few hundred kph speed seems almost laughable. Still, you dare not run the engines too hot or cast about with active sensors for fear of tipping off your prey. The Zesh enters a gentle banking turn that'll take her around a rising column of cloud.

Weaving through the gas giant's atmosphere, the characters are forced to hunt the corsair as it dives in and out of hydrogen cloud banks. Fear of collision, either with the quarry or an SDB, if applicable, should be in the back of the players' minds. Additional impediments to the search come from Shepta itself. Murderous jet streams, radiation, colossal lightning storms and the like will make the pursuit just that much more difficult. (Of course, the pirates will be similarly affected.)

This part of the adventure can be as

long or as short as the referee desires. Build up the tension by having the pirates fade in and out of reach. (Use the battle in the nebula at the end of *Star Trek II* as a rough example.) Eventually, the pirates will be forced to make a break for it whether they've been successful in losing the PCs or not. The rigors of Shepta's atmosphere will take its toll in terms of crew performance, thus tempting them to get out while they're still able. This gives the crewmembers of the *Zeshliama* the chance they've been waiting for—to engage and capture the pirate ship. The specific details of how this might be accomplished are up to the referee.

BOARDING ACTION

It's dark in the corsair's hold, and gravity has obviously failed. Various flotsam fills the "air," bouncing to and fro in the slight tides caused by the ship's uneven tumbling. Gripping your rifle a little tighter, you set off toward the bridge. A few meters away, one of your crewmates paces you as you both advance forward.

Assuming the PCs are successful in flushing the pirates out of the gas giant, run the characters through the boarding and capture of the corsair *Nightspeed* using the deck plan for the Type-P provided. Hurling through space, its environmental and gravitic system out, the *Nightspeed* should be an interesting location for hand-to-hand, compartment-to-compartment fighting.

If the PCs capture members of the pirate crew and if the *Nightspeed's* computer remains relatively intact, the characters have their chance to learn the coordinates of the secret, deep-space depot. PC members of the crew or an NPC skilled in Interrogation will be required to question the pirates. An individual possessing Computer skill will be required to manipulate the *Nightspeed's* computer. The best course of action is to corroborate what the pirates reveal with data in the computer and vice versa.

While questioning the pirates, or from evidence found aboard the *Nightspeed*, the PCs may learn that the pirate base will soon be upgraded and its defenses strengthened. If it were hit now, the base could be denied to the pirate band for some time to come, if not destroyed outright. This fact may spur the characters to act now, rather than wait for reinforcements. The next step is to regroup at Hepa in preparation for entering the Maw.

INTO THE MAW

The Birmingham is pacing the Zesh as it careens through space. The patrol tender is not more than a few meters off your starboard wingtip. If you sit forward in your couch a bit, you can see the fuel probe locked firmly in the main fueling receptacle. You'll never have the fuel to come home again. It's feels a little like sitting on a bomb ready to go off.

External drop tanks are in short supply (none are stored at Hepa), and the *Zesh* lacks the cargo space for interior tankage, meaning there's no way to carry enough fuel for both legs of the trip. Luckily, a solution to the problem, albeit a dangerous one, is available.

The idea is for the *Zesh* and *Birmingham* to fly in tandem, accelerating up to the velocity used consistently by the pirates. The characters are then to charge their jump drive and quickly refuel from the tender so they have the hydrogen necessary for the return jump. The *Birmingham* will break away and get beyond 100 ship diameters, allowing the patrol cruiser to jump safely.

This maneuver calls for a steady hand at the helm, excellent timing and pilots who aren't faint of heart. Jump too soon, and the patrol cruiser's proximity to the tender could cause a misjump. Wait too long, and the stored energies in the jump drive system might blow the ship apart. Add to the equation the danger of collision, and the maneuver guarantees a wild ride for all.

While the *Zesh* jumps into deep space, the *Poni Express* will depart for the navy base at Cossor (2424 Zarushagar), the subsector naval headquarters, to alert the duchy as to what's happened.

THE LITTLE STAR THAT COULDN'T

The Zeshliama's crew has just secured from jump breakout stations. Everyone on the bridge not immediately needed at a console has clustered around the main holo tank. Vivid false color imagery is being pumped in from the EMS sensor arrays showing a massive infrared source. This is the first time you've been able to observe a brown dwarf first hand, and it's impressive. It radiates a significant amount of heat, and almost overshadows the much smaller IR and neutrino signatures nearby.

Breakout at 2027 Zarushagar will bring a surprise to all of those aboard the

Zeshliama. Some distance from the target coordinates is a substellar object or brown dwarf (see Background, on the following page). The excessive speed used by the pirates was necessitated by the need to match velocities with the wandering dwarf and the tiny world orbiting it.

Occupying a very distant orbit from the dwarf is a small ice-locked world which Rolling Thunder uses as a fuel refining and storage facility. A captured Type-R subsidized merchant is stationed on the surface, manned by a team of eight pirates. (Use either the basic character generation system from the **Players' Manual** or the Quick NPC Table in the **Referee's Manual** to roll up the pirates.) The grounded craft is surrounded by several collapsible fuel bladders.

The best approach for the characters to take is to "rig for silent running"—use a minimum of power so as to remain undetectable to neutrino sensors and avoid the use of active sensors. By doing so, the PCs might be able to avoid detection and retain the element of surprise.

PIRATE BASE

The Zesh is coasting inward toward the fuel depot located on the tiny world orbiting

the brown dwarf. Long-range passive scans have provided the layout of the base, and coordinates have been punched into the weapons console. All that remains is to get within optimum range. The timer floating in the air in front of you counts down the time to launch. If everything goes as planned, it should all be over soon.

The PCs have several options. They might simply try to nuke the site from orbit. If the referee feels this solution is too easy, another corsair ship can appear, or the *Zeshliama* can be hit by return fire, forcing a landing for repairs. The PCs might also consider capturing the base in hopes of gathering vital intelligence, in the form of data and prisoners, on Rolling Thunder's activities. If they're successful in taking the base, consideration could be given to holding it until the navy arrives, possibly waylaying more pirates in the process. Other courses of action are left to the players and referee.

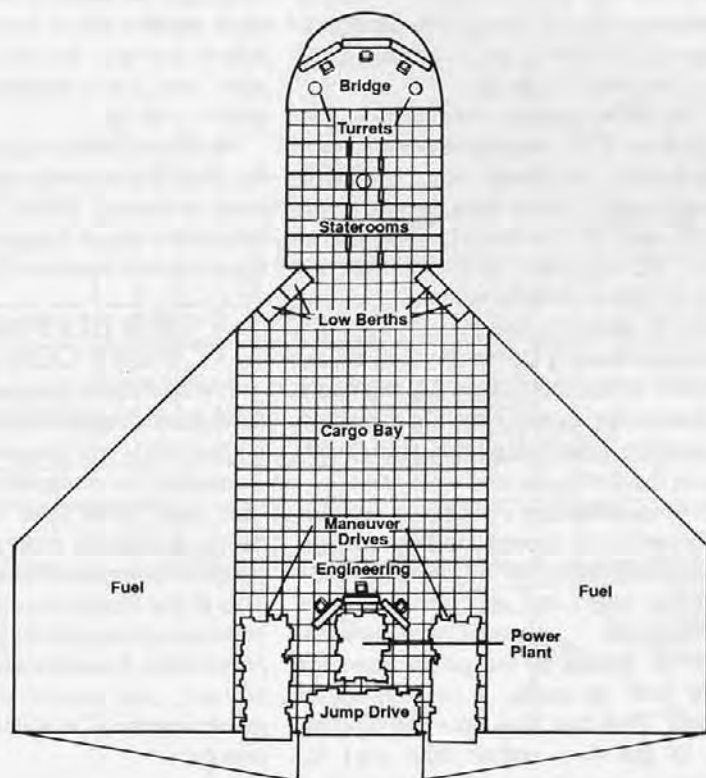
Surface: The referee should develop a sample sketch map of the area surrounding the grounded merchant vessel. The surface of the world is relatively flat, although there are enough terrain features—small hummocks and fissures—to provide usable cover should a

ground assault be undertaken. Finally, gravity on the worldlet is almost nonexistent. Individuals on the surface will find the use of maneuvering packs to be equally, if not more, effective than walking.

Type R: The merchant ship the pirates are using as their base has had its maneuvering and jump drives scavenged for spare parts and is permanently grounded. Its power plant and weapons remain fully functional, though, and its cargo hold is occupied by hydrogen purification, pumping and distribution equipment. Necessary supplies are also kept there in standardized cargo containers. (Both the purification and storage facilities in the hold and outside the ship are in addition to the merchant's integral hydrogen processing and storage capabilities.) The pirates have at their disposal one Factor-3 missile turret and one Factor-4 beam laser turret. All the pirates have combat armor and laser weapons at their disposal.

ENDGAME

The return to Cossor is largely uneventful, barring referee-imposed events. If the characters were successful in their mission, they can look forward to cash bonuses and the attention of the media (in proportion to how well they performed).



Nightspeed

Ship diagram copyright©1989 Digest Group Publications.

If the crewmembers performed particularly well, they will be welcomed as heroes, awarded the Hero of the Duchy (one of the Oasis' highest commendations) by Duchess Victoria and given a promotion in rank. (Enlisted characters will be considered for entrance to OCS.)

As for the former Rolling Thunder base, the independent navy will see it to that the worldlet is no longer usable to anyone but the duchy by placing a net of insats around it or by garrisoning it (depending on whether or not sufficient ships are available). For as long as the brown dwarf remains within a useful range, Oasis will use it to covertly cross the Maw.

BACKGROUND

Duchy of Oasis: On 032-1120, Duchess Victoria of Oasis (L) subsector announced the reestablishment of the Duchy of Oasis. (There had been a pocket empire by the same name in the region at the end of the Long Night.) She called the duchy "a coordinated effort by our worlds to band together to better serve Emperor Lucan in these troubled times." As part of the coordinated effort, Oasis retained the Imperial reserve fleets of the Wolf and Oasis subsectors, where the duchy is situated. Some outside observers have seen Victoria's declaration as a suspi-

cious move, but Lucan has yet to respond. (Given all his problems, it's doubtful the emperor will ever respond.) Close to 40 worlds hold membership in the duchy.

The duchy is modeled after the Imperium and contains many of the same institutions the average Imperial citizen grew up with. Also, Duchess Victoria has always worked to meet the needs of individual citizens, making this the cornerstone of her rule. For these reasons, Victoria is readily accepted as their leader by the billions of sophonts inhabiting Oasis. It is a relatively prosperous and stable place (as much as possible, given the ongoing Rebellion).

Referee: Victoria is conducting an active recruiting campaign in the systems surrounding the duchy. In some quarters, Oasis is sometimes referred to as the Independent Duchy of Oasis.

Wolf Subsector: Subsector K of Zarushagar is a borderland between the various factions—Lucan to coreward/trailing, Dulinor to far spinward and Daibei to rimward.

Most of the worlds in Wolf remain nonaligned with respect to outside powers, except within the confines of the duchy. Merchant travel through the area is sporadic because of the number of

pirates, corsairs and commerce raiders of various loyalties who roam at will. Naval forces from the Loyal and Vengeance fleets, as well as the Federation of Daibei, also transit the subsector on an irregular basis.

Brown Dwarf (Deep Space 2027 Zarushagar): Brown dwarfs fall in the middle ground between stars and gas giants. They are sufficiently massive that they radiate a significant amount of heat, but not massive enough for nuclear fusion to begin. Even using advanced sensors, they are difficult to detect. This one was found by a Rolling Thunder ship which misjumped and later reported back the object's vector.

The brown dwarf originated in Aslan space, where it was torn loose from its parent system by a rogue star deep in prehistory. It has spent the intervening millennia crossing the Great Rift. The substellar object is moving out of the plane of the galaxy and presents no potential hazard to the inhabited systems to coreward, the direction in which it's travelling.

The unnamed world orbiting the dwarf has a UWP of XSOA000-0 and occupies orbit number 350. Several other minor bodies orbit the brown dwarf, all unoccupied and of little consequence. Ω

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ITASIS



A back-water planet in Corridor sector, Itasis lies on a safe route to Deneb, a prime port of call for PCs seeking to “sneak out the back way” as Imperial control in the sector collapses in the face of Vargr attacks.

By Robert J. Cosgrave and Michael B. Cosgrave

Itasis was initially discovered by Vilani scouts shortly before -4000 Imperial. It was left virtually untouched for over 4500 years, until 457, when the newly founded Imperial Terraformation Bureau attempted to modify what was then a chilly ice planet. Vast amounts of greenhouse gases were injected into the atmosphere and a monitoring station was set up to observe climatic changes.

By 580, it was clear that the attempt had been a disaster. While the greenhouse effect had not gone "runaway" as elsewhere, the base temperature was not suitable for large-scale colonization.

In 1065, when the Second Grand Survey was published, more detailed geological analysis revealed large deposits of a rare earth (Hafnium) used in room temperature superconductors. Sternmetal Horizons bought the mineral rights and set up an extraction operation, complete with grade-C starport. In 1072, however, a revolutionary new development in superconductors rendered the specific rare earth no longer necessary. Deprived of the market, Sternmetal closed down the operation and looked for a way to cut its considerable losses. Once again, Itasis returned to being a deserted dustball.

In 1071, someone found a use for the planet. An Aslan pride, the *Khakhaiyr*, had recently been expelled completely from the hierate for some crime unknown to all but the pride but believed to be some act of treason against the combined *Tlaukhu*. Members of the pride appealed to the Imperium for asylum and land, and the Imperial authorities gave them Itasis, which had a small area bordering on habitable.

Since then, the Aslan have had moderate success in eking a living from the dusty soil, and they are fiercely proud of the land they have built. In recent years, a small number (about 1500) assorted Aslan, wishing to live with their own kind, but unwilling, or unable, to travel to the Hierate, have immigrated to Itasis. The locals welcomed them with open arms and assigned them land grants in the dustier parts of the habitable area.

In 1116, however, the arrangement showed strain. A local reporter uncovered a small fraud by leading Agricultural Co-operative officials. The amount involved was trivial, but the reporter, a human named Janus Clemp, died suspiciously in a shooting accident two days

later. The Agricultural Co-operative denied allegations that it was involved, but many in the farming community concluded that an unduly large amount of money was feeding "co-op fat cats," and the local population began to polarize. The new immigrants and those disgruntled with the Agricultural Co-operative, mainly the poorer farmers, formed the Free Farmers Union. Others stuck with the Agricultural Co-operative.

The 1116 growing season passed without major incident, as the Agricultural Co-operative was willing to buy the Free Farmers' grain at usual rates. But in early 1117, the Agricultural Co-operative announced that it would no longer deal with the Free Farmers. The co-op refused to dismantle its monopoly on interstellar agricultural trade and so effectively cut the Free Farmers off from supplies of seed and a market for their produce. The fuse was lit for war.

Tension grew through the year. As planting time approached, incidents of violence increased. Eventually, on 194-1117, the Free Farmers and the Agricultural Co-operative called up their militias, and war broke out. The conflict lasted two inconclusive weeks and was characterized by Free Farmer attacks having initial success, but stalling when the Agricultural Co-operative forces retreated into First Landing.

On 208-1117, two mercenary cruisers containing crack Ashiman security troops arrived. The Ashiman government had heard of the conflict brewing and decided to send troops to keep the peace in the event of war. On the morning of 209-1117, a peace treaty was signed.

The treaty divides the land up among the belligerents, more or less along the original battle lines. The strategically important grain silos and responsibility for enforcing the truce go to the spaceport authority. Military command of the peacekeeping forces remains with the Ashiman commanding officer.

ECONOMY

The local economy is essentially agricultural. Specially geneered wheat, strain Kappa-Xerox 045B (known as KaX), is planted after the start of the rainy season. Aided by heavy irrigation from subterranean water, it matures to a crop of reasonable quality and is harvested before the end of the rainy season.

Virtually all of this crop is produced on contract for nearby Ashima. The crop is small (about 500,000 tonnes) but is a luxury on hydroponic-orientated Ashima. In return, Itasis receives seed grain, plus enough money to buy food and equipment. The seed from the particular strain of wheat is infertile, so the economy is totally dependant on the annual shipment of fertile seed, brought in by bulk carrier from Ashima. Considering the luxury value attached to "real" grain on Ashima, the Ashimans have been paying the Aslan a low price for their grain.

Some other mixed agriculture is also carried out, and a few camel-like *Teahtoirisyeh* stock animals are kept for meat and milk.

A minimal road network exists for light transportation. Transport of grain and other bulky cargoes is supplied by a large fleet of grav floaters. These are regularly pressed into service for irrigation purposes.

POPULATION

The mental makeup and social structure of the people is much closer to the human model than the Aslan. The colonists retain little of the Aslan culture and speak a hybrid Anglic/Trokh. They lack the normal Aslan superior attitude—they are proud, but not overbearing. The original colonists have a lingering hatred for the *Tlaukhu* because of their exile. In return, they are thought of as non-Aslan "barbarians" by the Aslan Hierate.

Most of the population lives in First Landing. Inhabitants commute out to the automated farms—some on a daily basis, other for periods of three or four days. Much of the farm work is done by crude agricultural robots, but they require supervision and programming. Most farms have a small air conditioned hut for overnight stays.

During the current conflict, all the Free Farmers have left the city and are staying at their farms, if not actually fighting.

Hidden Tattoos: The original colonist were all tattooed before exile to mark them as criminals. The few original colonists still living bear these marks.

Superstitious Males: With so few people on-planet, there are many reports of strange beasts and beings from the unexplored areas. The females scoff at these possibilities, but the males are highly superstitious about them. They

are also highly superstitious about the crime for which the original colonists were exiled. Only the tattooed ones know what it was, and they will gladly die before revealing it.

Encounters

Roll	Rural	Urban
2	Agbot	Rumor
3	Agbot	Rumor
4	Agbot	Rumor
5	Air/raft patrol	Rumor
6	Dust storm	Militia patrol
7	Agbot	Militia patrol
8	Air/raft patrol	Patron
9	Firefight	Brawl/firefight
10	Militia patrol	Militia patrol
11	Militia patrol	Militia patrol
12	Militia patrol	Militia patrol

Air/raft Patrol: Either Agricultural Co-operative or Free Farmers, depending on the location. They will stop the PCs and search them, enquiring as to their business.

Brawl/Firefight: Two groups of opposing factions clash in a bar or street. If both sides are armed, a firefight will ensue until the Agricultural Co-operative militia (1D6 squads) arrives and starts shooting people at random. As civil order degenerates with the outset of war, these brawls will be between rival gangs of looters.

Dust Storm: High winds and dust reduce visibility to 15 meters. for 1D6x5 minutes.

Firefight: The PCs stumble into a conflict between Free Farmer and Agricultural Co-operative forces. Size varies depending on the location. In a front-line district, there are two or three squads per side. Behind the lines, there are two squads for the "home team" and one for the outsiders.

Militia Patrol: As described in Air/raft Patrol, above, except the individuals are on wheeled vehicles or on foot.

Patron: First Landing is full of people who want hirelings—either Agricultural Co-operative members or Free Farmers looking for skilled military personnel, or non-aligned locals looking for passage off-planet, bodyguards, protection, etc.

Rumor: Overheard words or a secret told in confidence over a drink. About a quarter of all rumors are correct and concern events in the near future (e.g., an Agricultural Co-operative worker saying "Word on the ground is the Free Farmers have called up their militia—ya think it's true?").

POLITICAL GROUPS

Agricultural Co-operative: Set up 40 years ago to manage the planet's agriculture, the Agricultural Co-operative has always been the *de facto* planetary government, controlled by the leader of the clan. Its profits have never been very big and are reinvested as a rule.

At the outbreak of war on 194-1117, the Agricultural Co-operative controlled First Landing city and the area to the east, more or less the same as when the treaty is signed.

The Agricultural Co-operative has about 4000 supporters, of which 1300 are capable of fighting. They are armed at very diverse levels, but generally about TL8. They are, effectively, a bad militia, but the Agricultural Co-operative supplements them with four squads (48) well trained soldiers, and three recently purchased G-carriers armed with fusion XRP-15s. The co-op also has 15 other assorted grav vehicles, including three *Meadowlands*-class grain carriers, and two long-range search and rescue (SAR) air/rafts, plus one standard gig—all now converted to military use. Two *Rampart*-class fighters are stationed at the spaceport, on loan from the sector navy to provide antipiracy patrols. The *Ramparts'* pilots (Imperial) were ordered not to interfere with local politics, but the co-op seized the fighters on 190-1117.

More importantly, the co-op now controls all the grain trade, thus effectively besieging the Free Farmers.

Free Farmers Union: Formed about 18 months ago, the Free Farmers control about half the viable farmland, mainly to the south and west of First Landing. They run their area as a loose Agricultural Co-operative.

Mentally, their makeup is closer to the traditional Aslan stereotype, due to the recent infusion of young Aslan blood. Virtually all the new emigrants are supporters of the Free Farmers.

The Free Farmers have about 4500 supporters, of which almost 2000 are capable of fighting. They are armed reasonably well to TL10 and are more skilled with their weapons than their adversaries. They have under their control 10 assorted grav vehicles, including one recently stolen *Meadowlands* grain carrier.

The headquarters of the Free Farmers is located along the Eiyas coast, about 100

kilometers northwest of First Landing.

Vargr Enclave: This small (300) enclave of Vargr—"The Popular Oengfeng Antirobotic Jihad"—has existed for about five years. The members are opposed to use of farm machinery, especially robots, and their basic philosophy is to produce by the sweat of their brows. Thus, they grow little grain to trade, but concentrate on subsistence farming.

While they appear to be quite peaceful, from the air it is clear that their farmstead (where they actually live, unlike most Itasian farmers) is expertly designed for defensive purposes. The area is a network of booby traps, outworks, foxholes, Claymore mines and killing zones. This setup reflects their somewhat militant attitude toward those who may seek to destroy them. While not possessing any large equipment (vehicles, etc.) these Vargr are extremely well equipped, up to TL14, and well trained. Their weapons are actually supplied by Vargr corsairs, anxious to have help in case they ever need to control Itasis. The enclave members are very careful to hide all weapons. The locals are unaware of the Vargr's capabilities but distrust them. The Vargr rarely venture into town and have been suspected of recent attacks on agricultural robots.

The enclave is located in-land about 110 kilometers from the Free Farmers headquarters and 170 kilometers from First Landing.

Hermits: There is a monastery (20 Vargr monks) somewhere in the southern hemisphere (no one knows where).

A retired corporate executive has a large villa about 1000 kilometers west of First Landing, and he is there about half the time. No one else normally lives there, but the security system has fairly comprehensive coverage to a radius of 100 kilometers, and automated, fixed-site defenses are capable of dealing with most intruders without difficulty.

CLIMATE

The atmospheric taint is actually a lethal bacterium, which kills within 12 hours of exposure. Everyone on-planet is immunized. Visitors should be sure to get their shots on landing and irradiate their ship once they clear the atmosphere.

The inhabited area's temperature is moderated considerably by the ocean to

Continued on page 34.

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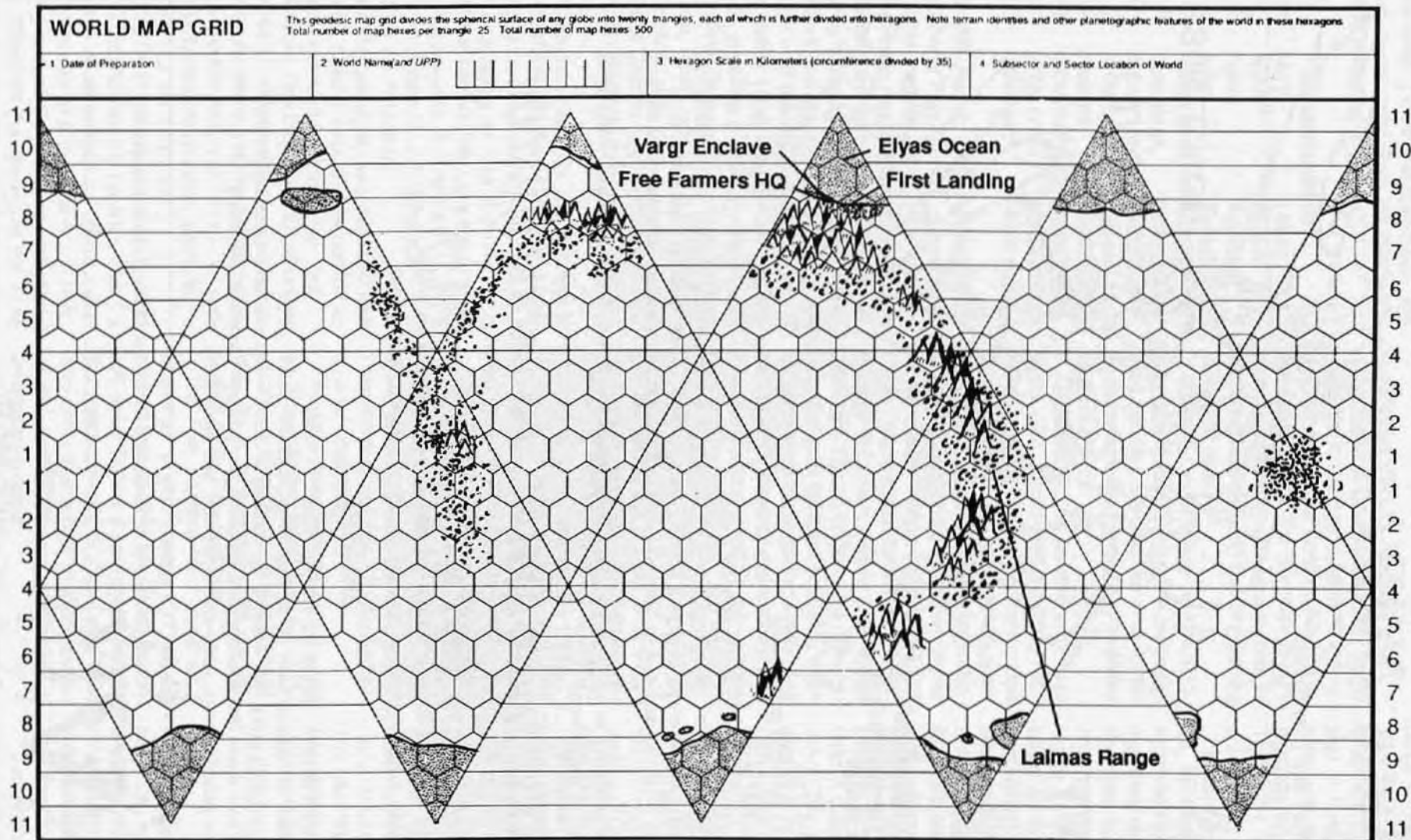
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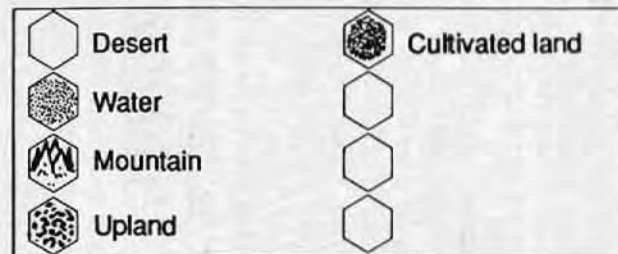
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City, State, ZIP _____



IS Form 21



World Map Grid (Large)

Continued from page 32.

the northeast, the Eiyas. The dry season is from about 050 to 240. At this time of year, the prevailing winds are south westerly, bringing hot, dry air up from across the desert. Temperatures in this season go up to 75°, and the water from the Eiyas almost totally evaporates, falling as rain up in the polar regions.

About 240, the wet season starts, when the wind changes to a cooler north-easterly. Moistened by the Eiyas, this wind results in moderate rains over the inhabited zone. The temperature at this time of year can drop down to 35°.

This Laimas Range is the main reason farming can be carried out in Itasis. The hot desert air in the dry season climbs over these mountains, where it cools slightly, giving the First Landing more moderate temperatures.

WORLD DETAIL SHEET

Date of Preparation: 245-1120.

World UWP: Itasis/Strand/Corridor 1413 C442375-A.

Size Related

Diameter: 3800.

Density: 0.94.

Mass: 0.12.

Gravity: 0.48.

Primary Mass (Star): 1.3.

Orbit NBR (Planet): 4.

Orbital Period (Planet): 1150.82.

Rotation Period: 29.81.

Axial Tilt: 26°.

Orbital Eccentricity: 0.015.

Seismic Stress: 5.81.

Asteroid Belt/Zones: N/A.

Primary Mass (Planet): N/A.

Orbit NBR (Satellite): N/A.

Orbital Period (Satellite): N/A.

Atmosphere Related

Atmosphere Composition: Low O₂ with biological taint.

Surface Pressure: 0.65 atm.

Stellar Luminosity: 1.37.

Orbit Factor: 295.693.

Energy Absorption: 0.820.

Greenhouse Effect: 1.05.

Base Temperature: 65.79° C.

Orbital Eccentricity Mod: +/-0.45°.

Latitude Temp Effects: +15 to -35° C.

Axial Tilt Effects:

- 0.00 hex rows 1-4, summer +0, winter -0.

- 0.25 hex row 5, summer +4, winter -6.75.

- 0.50 hex row 6, summer +8, winter -13.5.

- 0.75 hex row 7, summer +12, winter -20.25.

- 1.00 hex row 8-10, summer +16, winter -27.

Daytime Plus: +0.84° C.

Nighttime Minus: -1.4° C.

Native Life: No.

Atmosphere Terraform: No.

Greenhouse Effect Terraform: Yes.

Albedo Terraform: No.

Atm/Temp/Terraform: No.

Hydrosphere Related

Hydrographic Percent: 18%.

Hydrosphere Comp: Liquid water.

Number of Tectonic Plates: 1.

Hydrosphere Terraforming: No.

Terrain Terraforming: No.

Number of Major Oceans: 2.

Number Oceans: 0.

Number Seas: 2.

Number Scattered Lakes: 4.

Notable Volcanoes: 0.

Weather Control: No.

Natural Resources: Agricultural.

Processed Resources: None.

Manufactured Goods: None.

Information: None.

Population Related

Total Population: 9000.

Primary Cities: First Landing, Pop 8700, Starport C.

Secondary Cities: None.

Tertiary Cities: Oengfeng: Pop. 100.

Progressiveness: Progressive, Advancing.

Aggressiveness: Competitive, Neutral.

Social Outlook: Discordant, Friendly.

Government Related

Representative Authority: Executive.

World Government Description: Balkanized. Co-operative/Free Farmers.

Other Authority: N/A.

Law Related

Religious Profile: N/A.

Uniformity of Law: Territorial.

Legal Profile: 0/0 overall, 7/3 weapons, 0/0 trade, 8/8 criminal law, 1/2 civil law, 2/1 personal freedom (Agricultural Co-operative/Free Farmers).

Technology Related

Technology Profile: A8 high/low common; A energy; A computers/robotics; A communications; A medical; A environment; 9AA9 land, air, water, space; AA personal/heavy military; F novelty.

Adventures

For whatever reason, the PCs end up on Itasis about a week before war breaks out between two factions of farmers.

Shortly after their arrival, the PCs are contacted by Oihfaueaa, the secret leader of the Free Farmers group (549A8A, Admin-2, Persuasion-3, Tolerance-4 3/4). She needs a small, coordinated team to plan and execute technically orientated missions. She offers the PCs each a Cr3000 per month retainer, plus bonuses for each operation. Missions for the Free Farmers may vary. The first mission assigned to the PCs is that of acquiring a supply of seed grain for the Free Farmers.

The co-op maintains a 1000-ton reserve of seed grain in a silo near the spaceport. If this seed was in Free Farmer hands, it would supply enough grain to feed the farmers for another year, giving them more time to overthrow the co-op before famine rears its ugly head.

EQUIPMENT

The Free Farmers can provide the PCs with one air/raft with continental range radar and radio jammer; one *Meadowlands*-class grain carrier; three enclosed air/rafts, unarmed; five squads of militia armed to TL10; and four plasma PA-10s with independent power supply. These can be mounted on any of the vehicles.

Meadowlands-Class Grain Carrier

Craft ID: Grain Carrier, Type MT, TL10, MC13.6

Hull: 90/225 Disp 100, Config=4SL
Armor 4E Power: 3/6 Fusion
150 Mw Duration 30 hours

Loco: 2/4 Standard Grav
Thrust=1350 tons NOE=40kph
Top=120kph Cruise=90kph

Commo: Regional Radio-10

Sensors: V. Dist Radar-10

Off: None

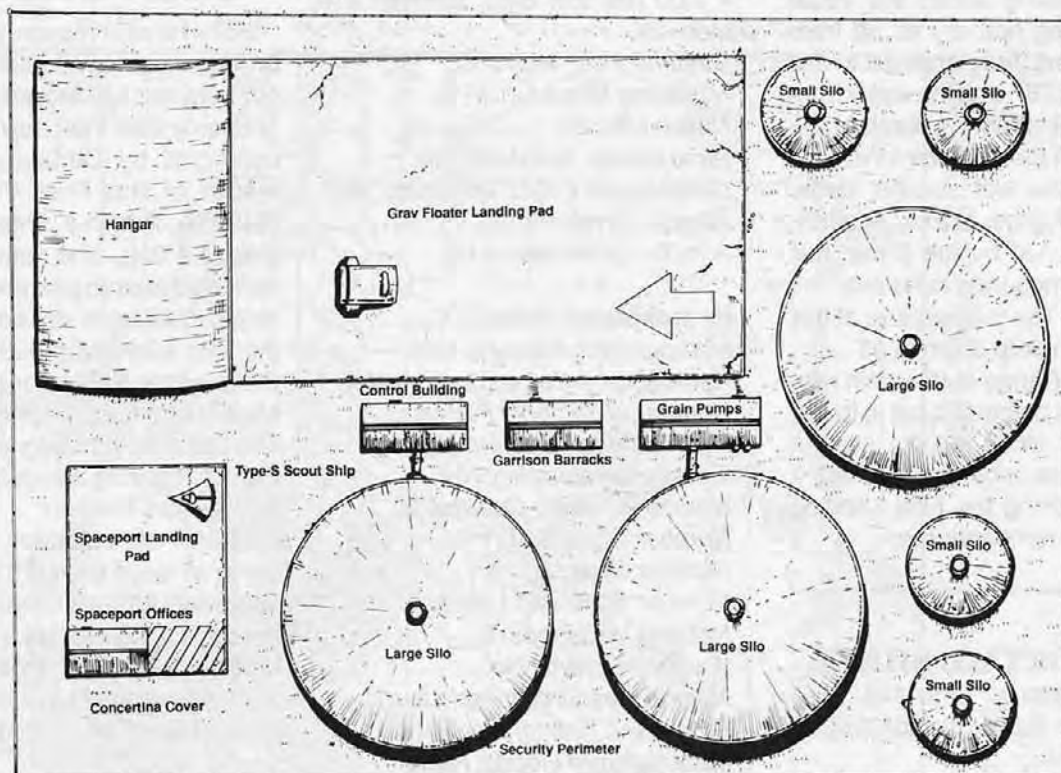
Def: Def DM +3

Control: 3xDynamic linked w. HUD.
Environ=Basic env

Accom: Crew=2 (Commander=1, Pilot=1) Passengersx4

Other: Cargo 1255Klitres (949 ton)
fuel 4Klitres ObjSize=Average
EmLevel=Faint

Spaceport and Grain Silos



This craft was specifically designed to carry grain, a less-than-one-ton per kiloliter cargo. Thus, while the cargo bay has a volume of 1255 kl and can technically fit up to 1255 tons of ordinary cargo, the vessel can only take off with 949 tons of cargo—the weight of 1255 kiloliters of grain (756 kilograms/kiloliter).

OBSTACLES

Pumping the grain from the silo to the carrier will take 80 minutes. The Agricultural Co-operative will use everything it has to prevent theft of the grain. Oihfaueaa will identify the main threats as being three G-carriers and the two *Rampart*-class fighters.

ENVIRONS

The city is almost invisible from above as it is entirely underground, with only some unappealing, gray plasteel patches of parched dust, air vents and hatches on the surface. The main street runs on an east-west access, with spiral ramps at each end linking the three main levels. The deepest part of the town is the main security, power and environmental con-

trol center, located seven levels below the next deepest part of the town. Behind the main buildings, a warren of private extensions and storerooms runs out several hundred meters under the desert. Extensive ducting carries power, air conditioning and sewage through the complex. A general aura of disrepair and decay hangs over the place—the only things in good condition are the robots and the bars.

Everything on the Spaceport and Grain Silos Map is Agricultural Co-operative property, except the spaceport.

Spaceport Landing Pad: Recessed 10 meters below surface level.

Spaceport Offices: Itasis Main Downport and Imperial Consulate. This area actually includes an office, bar, small apartment, and basic fuelling and repair facilities. The spaceport is technically grade C, and can provide C-level services, but it takes about five times as long as normal. Access to the spaceport is either from the pad or by subterranean access from the underground city.

Concertina Cover: This can be closed to seal off the landing pad from the intense heat or from occasional duststorms.

Grav Floater Landing Pad: The heavy cargo floaters, and search and rescue craft, operate from here.

Hangar: Grav floater service area. The Agricultural Co-operative maintenance personnel occasionally perform repairs on visiting ships.

Control Building: Equipped with regional range radar array.

Garrison Barracks: One squad of crack Agricultural Co-operative troops are posted here, with 2 squads of militia. The militia squads are rotated and trained by the crack troopers. Despite training operations, they maintain tight security.

Grain Pumps. Used to pump grain between the floaters and the silos. Also included in this building are irradiation facilities to decontaminate the grain before export.

Large Silos: Large, shallow containers for the storage of grain. They extend one meter overground and seven meters down. The large silo closest to the spaceport landing pad is armed with a twin, 14-centimeter, high-velocity autocannon. It is computer-linked to the radar array in the control building, and is capable of firing on both airborne and surface targets.

Small Silos: For storage of grain or imported seed. These are about 20 meters deep and one meter high.

Security Perimeter: A four-meter-high electric fence. Ω

LIGHTER THAN AIR LIGHTER THAN AIR

The following adventure is designed for *High Colonies* but can easily be adapted to a variety of roleplaying games.

By Andy Slack

The PCs are members of Van Owen's Rangers' Special Action Detachment, currently assigned to Janissary Station in Jupiter orbit. Their mission is to rescue engineers stranded aboard a flying laboratory before it falls out of the sky. They will no doubt expect plague, terrorists, alien monsters and other complications, but they are actually pitted against equipment failure, local weather and their own paranoia. That doesn't mean the mission is easy—or safe.

MERCENARY LIFE

The High Colonies are chronically short of trained manpower, and there is little surplus food to support soldiers who do nothing but train and maintain equipment. So clients often maximize the return on their security investment by using mercs for other jobs as well.

The smallest and least famous mercenary companies often find their members coerced into working on farms or in factories to fulfill their contracts. The largest are influential enough to spare their troop this ignominious fate. However, they are often called in during natural disasters, where their transport, skills, equipment and discipline can help to save lives and property. Combat engineers are used to construct bases and demolish hazards.

The merc companies encourage this for several reasons. First, it hones skills. Even though combat skills are rarely used in this kind of mission, other skills such as Hard Vac or Pilot are exercised, and those, too, are essential. Second, it keeps the troops occupied during long periods of garrison duty where boredom might otherwise be a major disciplinary problem. Third, it looks to the colonists hiring them as if they are doing something for the money.



MISSION

The PCs are minding their own business in off-duty hours when the intercom system blares into life, urgently summoning them to their unit commander. In the commander's office, they are informed that a refinery maintenance crew in Jupiter's atmosphere has lost control of its balloon and is drifting helplessly toward a storm. Crewmembers must be rescued in a matter of hours, or they will die. Because of their discipline and expertise, the Rangers have been asked to help.

The PCs' commander (Captain Markov, *High Colonies*, page 94) feels they are the best ones for the job. They need to equip themselves for a trip of several hours in Jupiter's upper atmosphere, and they will be briefed en route. Time is of the essence.

EN ROUTE BRIEFING

The PCs are issued with hard vac suits and a Waverider shuttle as they bid a hasty farewell. They are briefed during the first part of the trip.

They are to rescue a four-man maintenance and calibration crew aboard the balloon laboratory KX-181, an 85-ton laboratory supported by a 200-meter hot hydrogen balloon. Such laboratories investigate Jupiter's atmosphere and weather, and they pilot new gas extraction techniques for use by industry. Normally, they are unmanned, but every so often a crew is sent to repair on-board equipment failures, recalibrate instruments and perform preventative maintenance.

An unexpected storm has wrenched the crew's shuttle from the docking port and is pushing the laboratory off-course, toward a region of great turbulence at the edge of one of Jupiter's bands. Here jetstreams blowing in opposite directions will tear the laboratory to pieces, killing all aboard.

The PCs' objective is to rendezvous with the laboratory, recover the engineering crew and as much of their equipment as possible, and escape alive.

WAVERIDER SHUTTLE

Waveriders are streamlined craft intended for atmospheric flight. They are shaped like an arrowhead bent partly in half down the long axis. Made of stainless steel, they are silvered on the lower, concave surface and blackened on the upper surface.

In game terms, they are dual-function atmospheric spacecraft as described on page 75 of *High Colonies*.

The design dates from the late 20th century, invented by a Professor Nonweiler. The unusual shape traps the shock wave of reentry inside the ventral cavity, giving the craft its name and making it extremely maneuverable at all speeds from Mach 6 down to a few tens of meters per second. The design also has an immense landing footprint and can reach any point of a planet's surface from almost any entry point. Finally, as the ionized plasma of reentry is contained under the craft, it can remain in radio contact with orbital stations throughout reentry, which other designs cannot.

The ventral cavity is silvered to reflect the savage heat of re-entry, and the upper surface is blackened to radiate away what cannot be reflected. Both surfaces become very hot during atmospheric flight. Trapping the shock wave under the vehicle means that its dorsal surface has very little wind or turbulence; in fact, it is in vacuum at high speed.

When working in atmospheres with some chemical energy present (e.g., those of Earth or Jupiter), Waveriders frequently use external combustion engines. Fuel or oxidizer, as appropriate, is dumped into the ventral cavity and ignited, causing a controlled explosion which generates both lift and thrust.

Waveriders are made by the hundreds in a variety of sizes and are the most frequently encountered dual-purpose atmospheric craft. The deck plans shown are for a fairly typical small Waverider, with a crew of two and room for various combinations of small cargo and passengers up to a maximum of 20-some people. As breaks in the ventral surface are potential structural weaknesses, the cargo bay doors and airlock hatch are on the craft's back.

RENDEZVOUS

The PC with the highest Atmospheric Pilot skill will be assigned to fly the shuttle. If no PC has suitable skills, an NPC pilot with the skills shown on page 58 of *High Colonies* will be provided. To rendezvous with the flying laboratory, several successful skill rolls are needed, using Atmospheric Pilot skill.

The first roll is to fly successfully through the gap in Jupiter's radiation belts at speed.

These belts have the intensity of a continuous nuclear explosion and prevent extensive colonization of the four largest moons. Fortunately, as Jupiter's magnetic axis is offset from its axis rotation, there is a gap which skillful pilots can exploit to get into the atmosphere. Failure on this roll indicates that the PCs suffer mild radiation poisoning and require medical treatment on their return. However, that might just make them seem more heroic.

The second roll is to enter Jupiter's atmosphere successfully. Failure here means the PCs lose time (an hour or so) lining up for another attempt. This has no effect on the scenario, but the PCs should be encouraged to think time is running out. Catastrophic failure damages the shuttle, reducing the pilot's effective skill level by 10% for future skill rolls.

The third roll is needed to navigate to the laboratory's predicted position. Failure means the PCs get lost or have to detour to avoid the worst of the storms, and they lose an hour or two looking before they find their destination. The shuttle pilot may roll against Navigation rather than Atmospheric Pilot if he wishes.

A final skill roll is needed to rendezvous with the lab. The shuttle will be unable to dock because of damage caused when the engineers' craft was torn away. Failure on this roll means the shuttle accidentally brushed against the lab, which reduces the pilot's effective skill level by a further 10% for any future skill rolls.

BOARDING THE LAB

Give the PCs some time to come up with a way of getting the engineers out by themselves. If they fail to come up with anything better, have an NPC (either aboardship or in mission control) suggest that they fly directly under the airlock and send someone out into the relative calm on the Waverider's back. There, he can climb into the lab or jury-rig some way of docking.

Assuming the PCs choose that option, conduct the boarding in combat turns to heighten the tension. During each combat turn, the character flying the shuttle must succeed in an Atmospheric Pilot skill roll to hold it steady. In the unlikely event that this is too easy, reduce the pilot's effective skill level to compensate for fatigue based on the high gravity and turbulence.

It takes a character one combat turn to get out through the airlock onto the Waverider's back. If the pilot fails the skill roll

that turn, the PC on the craft's back must roll against Dexterity×5% or Hard Vac (his choice) to stay on his feet and in control. A failure means he slips and falls and must make a further roll to regain his feet. A catastrophic failure means the character's safety line has broken, and he falls to his death. (Anyone with any Hard Vac skill at all will think of using a safety line and can be assumed to suggest it to the others.) In the best TV tradition, the referee may wish to sacrifice an NPC brought along for the purpose to illustrate the dangers to the PCs.

Assuming the PCs stay in control, it will be obvious that they have no chance of repairing the shuttle dock enough to dock normally. The PCs must carry hard vac suits into the airlock, where the engineers can pull them inside and don them. The engineers may then be brought out through the airlock, braving the dangers of the shuttle's back, and taken aboard.

The above rolls to stay on one's feet remain in force. Each engineer takes three turns to retrieve—one to exit the lab, one to cross to the shuttle airlock and one to enter the shuttle. If the PCs are smart, they will rig a safety line between the lab and the shuttle, and get the engineers to clip themselves to it. The safety line gives a 10% bonus to engineers' rolls to stay in control. Other bright ideas on the part of the PCs should likewise be rewarded with an increased chance of success.

TAKING A DIVE

If someone falls off the back of the shuttle, there is a chance to recover him. The shuttle must immediately disengage from the lab and dive after the unfortunate, hoping to overtake him and catch him in the cargo bay as he falls. This will require a very difficult Atmospheric Pilot skill roll—reduce the pilot's effective skill to around 30% or whatever you think is reasonable—and only one attempt is allowed. Failure means the falling character smashes into the shuttle hull under 2.5G of acceleration, or misses the hull and gets crisped in the exhaust from the external combustion engine. Either of these will ruin his whole day, but both are probably better than falling into Jupiter until his suit implodes under the pressure.

If the character is lucky enough to get caught, smashing into the cargo bay at high speed will incapacitate him. He takes no further part in the scenario due

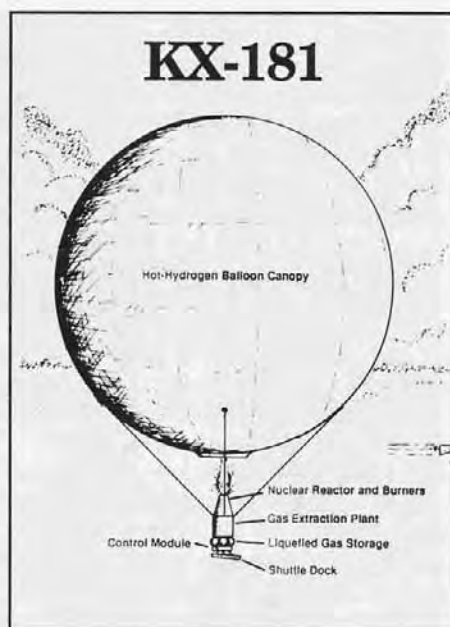
to his injuries.

If there is somebody else on the shuttle's back when this happens, he must succeed at both Dexterity and Strength rolls to hang on. The pilot may well have to choose just who he lets fall to their death.

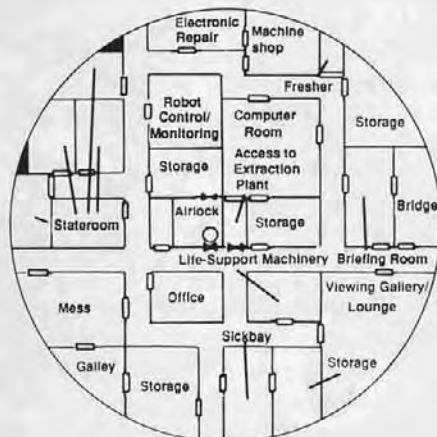
RETURN

To return, the PCs need two successful Atmospheric Pilot rolls. As they are no longer in such a hurry, failures just mean they take longer to get back.

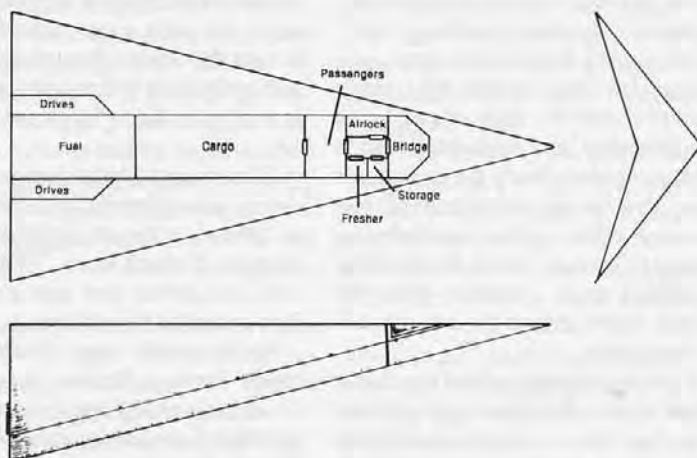
The PCs receive no combat pay or other financial reward, but they become heroes throughout the Jupiter system for a few weeks, and the engineers may feel indebted. Just what advantage the PCs gain from being owed favors depends on their own ingenuity. Ω

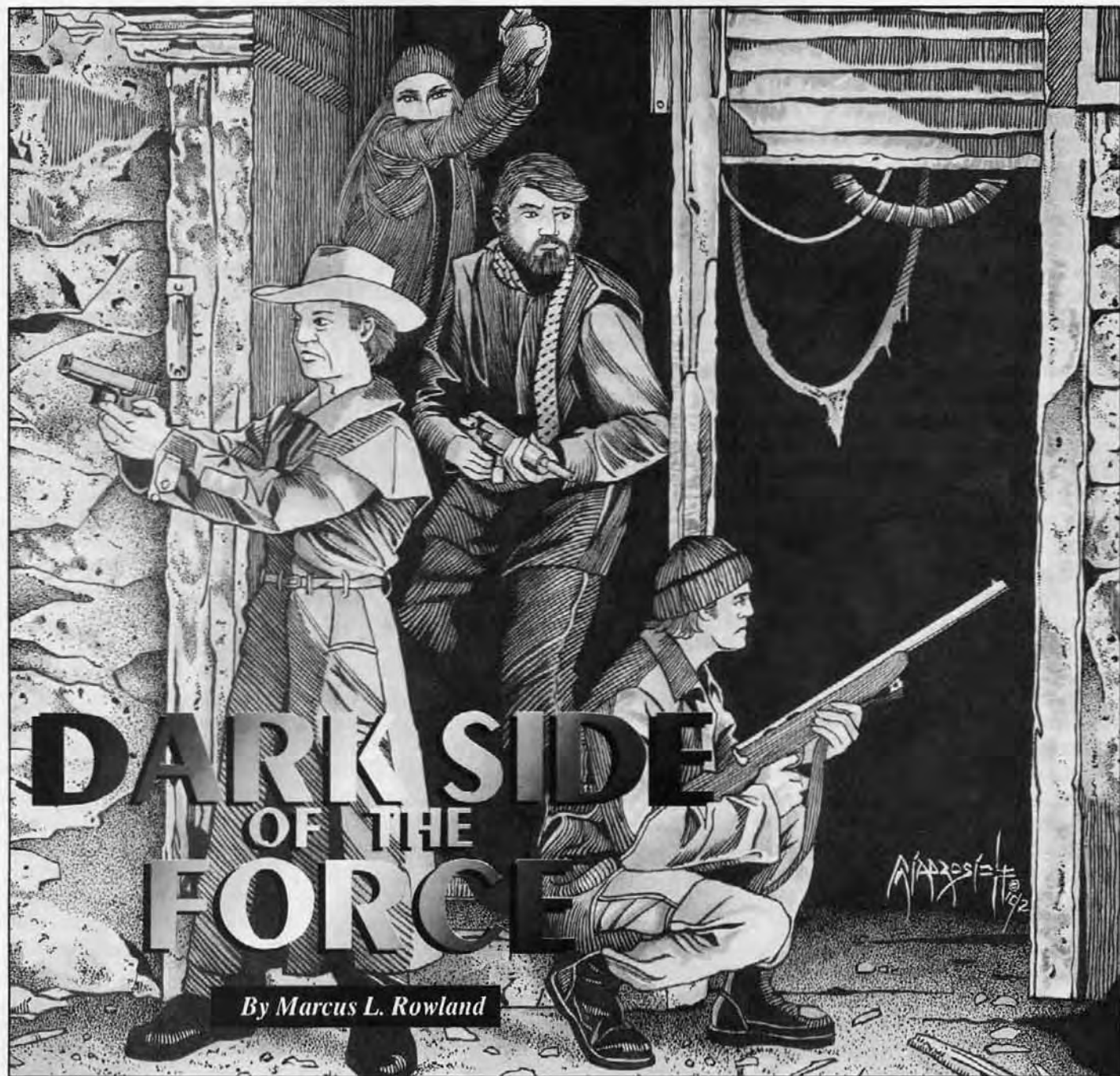


Control Module



Waverider





It's 6 p.m. on a bitterly cold winter day. For the last few months, George Charteris has been a patient in Purfleet Psychiatric Clinic in East London. It's an excellent clinic, and he's made a slow recovery from the ordeals that drove him over the edge of sanity. An hour ago, he called from Purfleet Station to let you know that he's finally out and needs a lift home. It's snowing, and British Rail has done its usual efficient job of canceling all the trains into Central London. As you drive out, you switch on your radio to catch the traffic news, which follows the news headlines on local radio.

"The RSPCA reports a record number of calls about frozen tortoises, and advises owners to bring them indoors and let them spend the winter awake. Don't let them hibernate.

"Sir Albert Anthony, the late commissioner of metropolitan police, was buried this afternoon. He was a controversial figure who forced the resignation of several officers with social links to known criminals. He died in a fall at his home last week. Anthony was 55.

"The charity Shelter has announced that deaths among London's homeless have risen by 28% since the start of the cold weather. Causes of death have included hypothermia, pneumonia and fires in derelict buildings occupied by vagrants."

As the traffic news finally begins, you reach Purfleet Station. To your surprise, Charteris isn't waiting; the station entrances are closed, and all you can see are a couple of torn shopping bags and some scuffed footprints in the snow.

This modern-day *Call of Cthulhu* adventure is set in London, but it can be converted to any big city. The adventure should be run several months after an important NPC (or a PC) has been committed to a psychiatric institution. If no such character is available, invent one. For convenience, this character is referred to as George Charteris throughout this adventure, but you may change his name and description to suit your campaign.

Note: Investigators in this adventure may suffer arrest, injury or death. *Call of Cthulhu* is set in a universe in which the odds are stacked strongly against humanity; investigators shouldn't be able to escape the consequences indefinitely. You may want to run this adventure to close a modern-day cam-

paign or to terminate expendable characters to remind players that investigators walk the edge of a lethal precipice.

WEIRD CRIMES

For many years Scotland Yard's Weird Crimes Squad fought the occult in London and was itself the target of numerous sinister plans. Unfortunately, the squad was disbanded (and most officers asked to resign) in 1936, when cultists tricked the squad into arresting the Vatican City ambassador on witchcraft charges.

Without the vigilance of the squad, Scotland Yard was soon infiltrated by cultists, who extended a web of magic, corruption and blackmail, slowly ensnaring hundreds of police officers. Today, almost all sections of the metropolitan police have been infiltrated by a variety of evil cults, from Satanists to servants of the Cthulhu Mythos. Some departments are entirely corrupt; the rest are headed that way. Fortunately, there are many conflicts of interest, and no one cult has ever gained control. There is a continual struggle for supremacy, totally unseen by the public, with occasional uneasy truces when the interests of several cults coincide. One common ground is the concealment of cult activities—no one wants the public to know anything about the reality of the occult, so everyone cooperates to disguise sacrifices and cult-inspired murders as traffic accidents, suicides, drunken brawls and other "innocent" deaths. The police have unusual advantages in procuring victims, typically homeless vagrants and alcoholics who will never be missed.

Sir Albert Anthony recently became commissioner. A politically appointed outsider, he dismayed all factions by launching a sweeping investigation into police corruption. He learned just enough to endanger the cultists, who decided to destroy him. One department had the power to do the job quickly and quietly—the Flying Squad, which specializes in armed operations against known violent criminals. This squad has long been run by servants of Th'Yasku'hakula, a Llogir living beneath London's docks. The Llogir demanded 100 lives as payment for the killing.

Since Anthony was killed, members of the Flying Squad and several other cults have been making an all-out effort to capture enough vagrants, transport them to the Docklands for sacrifice, then dump the bodies back on the streets. Th'Yasku'hakula is using the magical energy of the sacrifices for its own long-term plan. With this final boost to a pool of magic it has accumulated over decades, it intends to drive humanity out of Britain by inducing a new Ice Age. The unseasonably cold weather is the first step in this plan, although most of the extra deaths reported by Shelter are actually sacrificial

victims, drained of their magical essence and life.

Unfortunately, some of the officers concerned in the mass sacrifice have grown a little careless. Seeing an "obvious vagrant" at the station, Detective Inspector Mondale and Detective Sergeant Anders of Purfleet CID (both devout Satanists) have "arrested" Charteris. He is now locked in the cells at the local police station, pending transportation to the Docklands and a sacrificial ceremony disguised as an acid house party. A van will arrive soon. Charteris' fragile mental state didn't prepare him for this ordeal; he has suffered a relapse and can't defend himself.

MISSING PERSON

Charteris is missing. No one at the station recalls seeing him, but the abandoned bags hold his clothing and a few clay ashtrays, the products of an occupational therapy class.

Eventually, the PCs should find three porters taking a long tea break in the station buffet. One remembers seeing Charteris about half an hour before the PCs arrived. If the PCs examine the road carefully, they'll find the tracks of a car or van in the snow, but the details are too blurred to be useful. There is also a blood stain—Charteris' nose was hit as the police bundled him into the van. The tire tracks can be followed onto the main road, but they are then lost among hundreds of slushy ruts.

If the PCs don't decide to go to the police for help, one of the porters decides they are acting suspiciously and calls the police. A car arrives a few minutes later, with two uniformed constables who want to know what the PCs are doing. By chance, these two officers aren't part of the conspiracy.

If the PCs act reasonably and explain their problem, the police suggest that they call in at Purfleet Police Station and fill out a missing person report. If the PCs act stupidly (for example, by pulling a gun on the police), the constables call for backup, then attempt to arrest the PCs.

At the police station, the PCs are taken to an interview room. After a few minutes, Detective Sergeant Anders arrives and starts to type a report as the PCs explain the disappearance. He'll try to keep things low-key and as routine as possible, while suggesting that Charteris has simply wandered off. Once he learns that Charteris recently left the asylum, he says, "He's a nutter, isn't he? You can't expect us to put out an all points alert—nutters just don't do things like normal people."

Anders doesn't try to explain why the bags were left. If someone mentions the blood, he suggests that it might have been a cat or a bird. If someone mentions the occult, he says, "What do you think I am, an idiot!" He then tears up the form and tells the PCs to stop wasting valuable police time.

Eventually, the telephone rings. Only Anders' end of the conversation is audible: "Hello....Yes, speaking....Yes, Mondale wants it picked up right away....Yes, I know it's bloody snowing! So bloody what?....No, I can't talk about it now—try me later....Okay, if you insist—I can pop down for a minute."

THERE HE IS!

After this call, Anders apologizes and says he has to pop out for a while. He leaves the PCs sitting in his office. Naturally, all drawers, etc., are locked; in any case, they don't contain anything incriminating.

On a successful Listen roll, the PCs will hear an engine start several minutes later. The curtains are closed, but it's easy to open them and peep out into the yard behind the police station. There are bars on the window, and it is locked and double-glazed, so there is no way to open the window or get out.

Anyone looking out the window sees two plain-clothes officers (Anders and Mondale) pushing someone into the back of an unmarked green van, which lurches off into the night. It isn't possible to identify the person in the van with any certainty, but it looks suspiciously like Charteris. On a Spot Hidden roll, the licence number of the van can be read—it's GLE 36J, a very old licence number, but the van looks quite new. If the adventurers have contacts with access to the Police National Computer, they'll learn that this number belonged to a Honda moped that was scrapped in 1980—the licence plates are fakes. How do the PCs react?

If they run out of the room and start to make trouble, or if they make trouble when Anders returns, they will be locked up. The next day, Anders and Mondale deny any knowledge of Charteris, and even deny that they were out in the yard. There is no evidence to the contrary. A few days later, Charteris is found dead in the Thames below Purfleet, an obvious suicide. The PCs are charged with a breach of the peace (or assault or firearms charges, if appropriate) and fined or sentenced to prison terms. Mondale and Anders go to ground, concealing their activities and arranging for friends from the Fraud Squad, Drugs Squad and other branches of the police to give the PCs a very bad time.

If the PCs leave the station without waiting for Anders to return, then follow the van, no one will attempt to stop them. Naturally, Anders knows something is wrong and guesses that they might have seen the van. He radios the van driver to watch for pursuit.

If the PCs do nothing, Anders will return a few minutes later. His boots and trouser cuffs are damp with snow. If the PCs finish making their report and leave quietly, they find that the tracks of the van soon merge into the slush of the main road. They may want to stake out the police station and wait

for Anders or Mondale to leave. Both detectives leave 10 minutes later in an unmarked red Volvo.

HOSTILES

The van (and, later, the Volvo) takes the A13 west toward central London, near the Thames, speeding along the slippery neon-lit road in fairly light traffic. The van driver soon realizes that someone is following, and he speeds up as he enters heavier traffic in East Ham, losing the PCs unless their driver makes a series of successful Drive rolls. The van driver is very skilled, and the vehicle has all-weather tires which won't skid on snow. However well the PCs are doing, they lose contact with the police somewhere in the complex of road junctions and interchanges at Canning Town.

During the chase, the PCs should realize that they are being followed by a grey BMW estate car (six seats) with several radio aerials. The driver makes no attempt to disguise the fact that he's following, and he beckons for the PCs to stop once they've lost the trail. If they have a car phone, he'll call them, having looked into the car and noted the number while they were in the police station. The driver is in his mid-eighties, but still looks fit and alert. He smokes a foul black pipe and has the look of someone who has lived a hard, violent life.

The man introduces himself: "My name's Harry Raglan. I think I can help you. I've heard the police talking about you on the radio—seems you've been meddling in something they've been doing, something pretty naughty. What do you know about the Powers of Darkness?"

Raglan tells the PCs about the Weird Crimes Squad. He explains that he was forced to resign in 1936 and worked as a private detective until he retired in 1980. He's spent his retirement trying to solve some of the cases abandoned when the squad was disbanded, and he has found evidence of corruption in the police force. He suspects Satanism, but has no real proof.

Raglan has been tapping police radios for several days. A few minutes ago, he heard a message telling "Unit Zed Zed Nine" to be alert for pursuit by "hostiles." He has learned that this word is used by the cultists to indicate someone who is not part of the conspiracy. The message included the PCs' licence number, a description of their car and other details. As luck would have it, he was nearby and decided to see if he could find out more by talking to the PCs. He suggests that they join forces with him and abandon their car before it's stopped by the police.

THE GREAT RACE OF YITH

Some of Raglan's story is true, but he omits some important details. He now works

for the Great Race of Yith; and he has a very good idea what's going on in the Docklands.

To further its studies of humanity, the Great Race needs many resources and sources of information. Building a new chain of contacts each time someone is possessed would be inefficient, so the race set up trust funds for the hire of lawyers and other agents. Raglan was hired in 1941, but soon became curious about his employers. He learned the truth, realized that the Great Race wasn't interested in harming humanity, and decided that he might as well stay on the payroll and continue doing work that interested him. There aren't many other job opportunities for trained occult detectives.

The Great Race doesn't care about the struggle in Scotland Yard or the lives of a few tramps. But its current projects require another 20 to 30 years of study at the British Museum and other British centers of knowledge—an Ice Age would seriously disrupt the research. The Great Race has detected the buildup of magical energy and calculated the probable effects. A lawyer on its payroll has asked Raglan to come out of retirement and investigate.

Raglan's car is equipped with an illegal police radio scanner/receiver. He has a 12-gauge pump shotgun in the trunk, with 25 cartridges.

While Raglan is talking to the PCs, the radio occasionally crackles with police messages. Most seem unremarkable—disturbances near pubs, burglaries, traffic offenses, drunk drivers, accidents and so forth. One of the messages is a request for any sightings of the PCs' car, again identifying them as "hostiles." A little later: "Control to Zed Victor Nine. We have a telephone report from a nightwatchman on the Thameside Industrial Estate. Says he can hear an acid house party somewhere near the river."

The reply is loud, as though the transmitter is nearby, and almost drowned in the throbbing beat of savage music: "Zed Victor Nine to Control. Message received. I'll turn it down a bit. We'll be through for tonight in about an hour. Keep him stalled until then."

If the PCs don't head for the estate, Charteris dies 45 minutes later, and the "party" ends soon afterward. The police disperse, dumping the bodies at various locations in London, with no clue to the exact location of the murders. There will be another ceremony the next night, giving the PCs a further chance to confront the cultists, but too late to save Charteris' life. In the meantime, the police are looking for the PCs, who must lie low to avoid arrest on trumped-up drugs charges.

After hearing the radio message, the PCs can easily find the "party." Most of the industrial estate is completely dark and deserted, except for a few trucks and construction vehicles. The music should guide the PCs if

they just get out of the car and listen. Near the river, a warehouse is surrounded by cars and vans, noisy with the throb of acid house music.

ACCCCHHHHHHHDDDDDDDD

The warehouse is a modern building recently sold to a supermarket chain, but not yet in use. The owners would be horrified to know its current role. There are no windows at the front, just massive folding steel doors which are firmly closed and locked. The music seems to come from behind the doors. The door on the west side is closed but unlocked, and can be slid open. There is a small locked door on the east side of the building, and the van the PCs saw at the police station is parked there. If they followed Anders and Mondale, the Volvo is one of the cars beside the warehouse. Most of the cars near the warehouse are unmarked police vehicles, equipped with radios, and concealed lights and sirens.

Before the PCs go any further, a kind referee might suggest that they don't really stand much of a chance against these odds. (Are you feeling kind?)

If the PCs pull out at this point, Charteris will be killed. Raglan will try to enter the warehouse alone and will be killed before he accomplishes anything. The police will observe the PCs for many months to ensure that they haven't found out anything about the cult, and will frame them for drug offenses and other crimes if they make any attempt to investigate further.

If the PCs decide not to pull out, Raglan won't lead them into the building. He'd prefer them to take the initiative, and he says he's "not as quick on my feet as I used to be." He gets his shotgun from the car and gives it to the leader if none of the PCs are armed. The trunk also contains tire irons, spanners and other tools, enough to give everyone a club. As he hands out the weapons, Raglan pretends to stagger, puts a hand on his chest and says, "There goes my ticker again. I'll have to sit down for a few minutes." He won't let any of the adventurers help, and he won't accept first aid (which would reveal that he's perfectly well). He tells the PCs to "off and help your friend before it's too late." Once the PCs enter the building, he'll follow them in, extremely cautiously, hoping they'll divert attention from him.

The main warehouse is a huge chamber, reverberating to house music at hundreds of watts. Apart from an amplifier, speakers and a tape recorder near the main doors, it's completely empty.

Heavy Equipment Area: In this area are four parked fork-lift trucks. All are immobilized, with the ignition keys removed and a padlock stopping the steering wheel from turning. Another sliding door leads into the cold-storage section of the warehouse.

Offices: In the center office are two plainclothes policemen with a radio transmitter. They are generic Flying Squad officers armed with .38 revolvers, with 9 and 11 hits, respectively. If the PCs followed Anders and Mondale, they are also present, arguing with the other officers. If the PCs eavesdrop, they'll hear Anders ask for the return of Charteris, saying that the kidnapping has attracted too much attention. The other policemen refuse. It isn't hard to eavesdrop because they are shouting above the noise of the music. There is another door into the cold store from this room.

The other offices contain neat piles of clothing—men's in the northern-most office and women's in the one to the south. Each pile includes shoes and underclothes, and somewhere in each pile are a police warrant card, handcuffs and other equipment. Several piles are topped with holstered .38 revolvers. Each room also contains a hamper of brown sacking robes, with hoods which would cover most of the head and shade the face of the wearer.

Cold Storage: The cold storage area is kept at 4°C. Most of the rooms are empty, with a few notable exceptions:

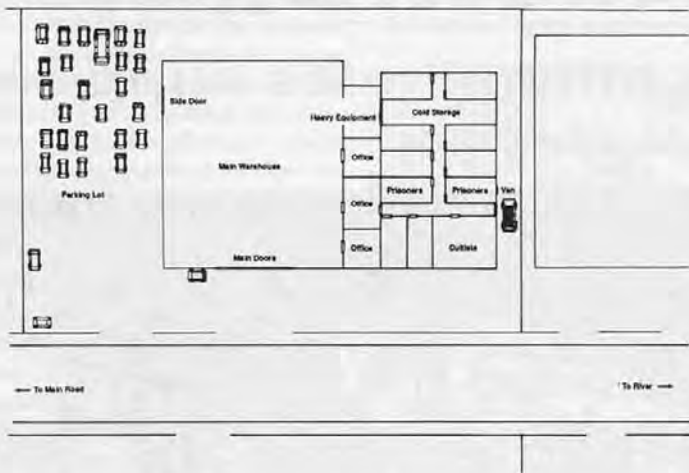
Prisoners: Two of the rooms in the cold storage area contain prisoners—tramps snatched from the street. Most of them are alcoholics or psychiatric patients released due to cuts in social service funding, and they will act irrationally if they are released. At least one should start singing or shouting if they are rescued. All the prisoners are handcuffed. Charteris is in the western-most prisoner room, in a near catatonic state of terror. He will revive slightly if he is freed, but he won't be able to help with the escape. Three policemen guard the junction of corridors outside the prisoner rooms room. They have 9, 10 and 12 hits, respectively, and are armed with .38 revolvers in belt-clip holsters. They wear normal street clothing.

Cultists: The largest room in the cold storage section contains most of the cultists. If the PCs are captured elsewhere in the warehouse, they'll be brought here. From outside, it's just possible to hear chanting and a rhythmic thudding noise from this room, although the commotion is almost drowned out by the music.

CEREMONY

Inside a room roughly 30 by 40 feet in size are dozens of police officers, all wearing brown robes and chanting rhythmically. All carry truncheons (night sticks), which they thump on the ground in time to the chant. They are gathered in an ellipse around a complex pattern of chalk lines, which twist in a manner that hints at non-Euclidean dimensions (or bad draftsmanship). Any PC making a Cthulhu Mythos roll will realize that a powerful summoning spell is in

Warehouse Environs



progress, but won't recognize it more precisely. In fact, the spell is unnecessary—Th'Yasku'hakula has been in the warehouse in its invisible form for several hours, watching the worshippers assemble and checking that there is no danger. It needs to materialize to take the sacrifice, but it won't do that while there is any danger of an attack. If the PCs interrupt the ritual, Th'Yasku'hakula will try to use its power to destroy at least one interloper, then sink back into the floor and the underlying rock if the PCs aren't overcome by the police. It won't automatically spot the PCs as outsiders if they disguise themselves in robes and do nothing to disrupt the ceremony.

If the ceremony isn't interrupted, or if the PCs are captured, Th'Yasku'hakula materializes half an hour after the radio message was overheard. The worshippers begin another chant, while the prisoners are brought in, pushed toward the Llogir, and knocked out with truncheons. Th'Yasku'hakula starts to drain magical energy from the unconscious victims, taking a Magic Point from each victim each minute. A minute after the victims are drained to 0 Magic (most start with 6 to 10 points), their bodies frost with ice as the Llogir draws the remaining life force from their defenseless bodies.

FINISH

Raglan makes his own way to the sacrificial chamber. When the Llogir materializes, or manifests its power, he'll throw his energy grenade (see below) at the Llogir, shout "Run for it!" and depart rapidly. Wise PCs should follow if they are able. Raglan has no intention of staying anywhere near an angry Llogir. If the PCs catch up with him before he starts his car, they are welcome to ride with him. Once he's moving, anyone left behind should start running very fast.

The grenade disrupts the Llogir's control of its store of magic, which is released in a

powerful underwater explosion that raises a gigantic waterspout over the Thames, sinking several barges before it dies down. The Llogir then retreats to its lair beneath the Thames, its plan ruined by the loss of its hoard of magic. Any remaining prisoners are killed by the surviving cultists, who will then start a hunt for everyone who escaped.

If the PCs blow things so badly that Raglan is captured without using the grenade, the Llogir will continue accumulating magic, but global warming and other factors will moderate its power and prevent another Ice Age. The winters will be severe for the next few years, but that's all. Eventually, Th'Yasku'hakula will give up or devise another plan.

If they work really well, the PCs may disrupt the ceremony, kill a few cultists and rescue some or all of the prisoners. This leaves them pursued by enemies equipped with all the technical advantages of a modern police force and unhindered by any regard for due process of law. Even if they managed to kill everyone in the warehouse, dozens of cultists and hundreds of others will want to track down those who know too much about the dark side of the force.

GENERIC CULTIST POLICE/FLYING SQUAD

STR 14, CON 14, SIZ 14, INT 13, POW 10, DEX 12, APP 10, EDU 14, SAN 35, HP 14.

Damage Bonus: +1D4.

Weapons: Fist/punch 60%, 1D3+1D4; Truncheon 65%, 1D6+1D4; Grapple 55%, damage special. (Flying Squad only: 25% chance of .38 revolver, 50% damage 1D10.)

Skills: Climb 55%, Credit Rating 20%, Cthulhu Mythos or Occult 10%, Drive 65%, Law 45%, Sneak 25%.

Spells: 10% chance of one appropriate cult-related spell.

Equipment: Most have radios, handcuffs, notebooks and other police equipment. All have police warrant cards. Ω

ENCUMBRANCE

An optional rules supplement

By Michael Schiavetta



Part of the thrill of gaming lies in the "goodies" your PC gets to use. Weapons. Gadgets. But the desire to incorporate every new object you come across into your campaign must be tempered a bit by reality. And reality insists that a character can only carry so much.

The amount of equipment a character can carry is determined by raw strength, and anyone carrying beyond his limit will be encumbered and subsequently penalized.

To calculate encumbrance, look up the Strength score of a character on the Basic Encumbrance as Determined by Strength Table. The corresponding value is the num-

ber of kilograms the character can carry without being encumbered. Next, check the Encumbrance Limits and Penalties Table to determine the penalties for exceeding a listed encumbrance and any multipliers applied to the basic encumbrance score.

EFFECTS ON MOVEMENT

Penalties affect a variety of character stats. Any character's maximum movement for one speed action is 10 meters (*Star Wars Rules Companion*, page 10). When encumbered, however, this maximum drops accordingly, as listed on Encumbrance Limits and Penalties Table.

For example, character with a Strength of 2D would have a basic encumbrance of 18. If that character exceeded his basic encumbrance to, say, 20, he would only be able to move eight meters per successful speed action, and he would have increased difficulties when rolling DEX, any DEX-related skill, Brawling, Climbing/Jumping and Swimming (+3, in this instance).

A character may move up to half his speed action movement without any die code penalty (*Star Wars Rules Companion*, page 10). This should be taken into account when using the encumbrance system. For instance, a lightly encumbered character could move four meters

without being penalized for multiple skill use (since eight meters would be his new maximum per speed action).

The maximum range represents the most a character can lift or drag for a few meters before he must take a rest. To lift an object which falls into the maximum range, a character must make a lifting roll for every meter he wishes to move. The first meter is Very Easy, but for each extra meter, the difficulty is increased by one level (three meters would be Moderate, for example). A failed roll means the character has dropped the object or must rest due to overexertion. Any character lifting an object in the maximum range cannot take any other actions while carrying it (except, of course, movement).

In addition, when a character is dragging an extremely massive object, the referee may alter the maximum movement per successful speed action, depending on the surface upon which the object is being dragged. Pulling something along concrete is harder than pulling that same object across ice.

It is possible for someone to carry up to six times his basic encumbrance. However, this entails making a Very Difficult Lifting roll and prohibits the character from taking any other action at all (including movement). After the object is released, he must make a Stamina roll. A result in the Very Easy difficulty means the character must rest for 6D minutes; an Easy roll means he must rest for 5D minutes, and so on. A character making a Very Difficult roll only has to rest for 2D minutes (minimum rest period). Any actions performed before the rest period has expired are subjected to a -1D penalty (due to fatigue).

EQUIPMENT WEIGHT

A referee may rule that a light object causes encumbrance simply because it is awkward to hold. Most people could carry a lightweight, 10-foot-long piece of wood, but the agility and balance required to support it would cause encumbrance, nonetheless.

Encumbrance may vary with the local gravitational field due to its effect on the weight of the equipment. In general, how-

ever, don't worry too much about gravitational fields unless there is a very noticeable difference from the accepted standard.

When a character wears armor, the bulkiness of the suit tends to hinder the wearer's Dexterity (*Star Wars Rules Companion*, page 30). The actual weight of the armor may further hinder a person's prowess as designated by the encumbrance rule. Improved armor usually has a weight of three kilograms per pip (remember, three pips equal one whole die).

Because of their 2D Strength, stormtroopers have a basic encumbrance of 18, so they are usually not encumbered at all with their usual weapons and equipment.

Spacetroopers (or 0G stormtroopers) wear massive armor which would put them well into the maximum range, if not for the fact that they operate in 0G conditions. Whenever a character is in a situation where the force of gravity is suppressed, his encumbrance automatically drops to 0 due to the weightlessness experienced. The bulkiness of armor, however, still reduces Dexterity as per normal rules. On the rare occasions when they enter a gravity field, 0G stormtroopers still suffer no penalty, due to the advanced powered armor which compensates for their loss of Agility. Incidentally, spacetrooper armor weighs about 90 kilograms and is almost impossible to pick up, due to its massive size.

The standard weight of many basic items are

Basic Encumbrance as Determined by Strength

Strength	Encumb. (kg)	Strength	Encumb. (kg)
1D	8	4D	30
+1	11	+1	32
+2	15	+2	34
2D	18	5D	38
+1	19	+1	42
+2	20	+2	45
3D	22	6D	50
+1	23	+1	55
+2	25	+2	60

Encumbrance Limits and Penalties

Amount of Gear (kg)	Level of Encumbrance	Dist./Speed Action
Between 0 and x1	None	10
Between x1 and x1.5	Light	8 (+3)
Between x1.5 and x2	Moderate	6 (+5)
Between x2 and x2.5	Heavy	5 (+7)
Between x2.5 and x3	Very heavy	4 (+10)
Between x3 and x3.5	Extremely heavy	2 (+15)
Between x3.5 and x5	Maximum	See rule

The numbers in parentheses represent the difficulty modifier applied to certain attributes and skills. These penalties apply to DEX, all DEX-related skills, Brawling, Climbing/Jumping and Swimming. For reaction skills, deduct the appropriate amount from the die roll.

listed on the Equipment Weight Table, below. These figures represent the average masses of various pieces of equipment on standard-gravity worlds, though different companies might manufacture heavier or lighter variants.

Equipment Weight

Explosives	Mass (kg)
Grenade	1
Grenade launcher	3
Thermal detonator	1
Vehicle mine	4

Medical Equipment	Mass (kg)
Bacta tank	35
Medpac	1

Melee Weapons	Mass (kg)
Force pike	4
Gaderffii	3
Hatchet/vibroaxe	2
Knife/bayonet	1/10
Lightsaber	1
Staff/club/spear	1
Vibroblade/vibro bayonet	1

Miscellaneous	Mass (kg)
Ammo bandolier	1/10
Breath mask (standard)	1
Chronometer	1/10
Comlink	1/10
Glow rod	1/10
Macrobinoculars	1
Pocket computer	1
Rations (one week)	1/10
Recording rod	1/10
Syntherope (15 meters)	1/10

Clothing: Usually weighs from 1-3 kg. Some items, such as spacesuits, may weigh around 10 kg, sometimes more.

Tools: Usually weigh around one kilogram. Tool kits might go as high as seven kilograms.

Personal Armor	Mass (kg)
Bounty hunter armor (typical)	8
Protective helmet	3
Stormtrooper armor	9

Ranged Weapons	Mass (kg)
Blaster carbine	3
Blaster pistol	3
Blaster rifle	4
Heavy blaster pistol	4
Heavy repeating blaster	45
Hold-out blaster	1
Light repeating blaster	18
Medium repeating blaster	34
Riot gun	40
Sporting blaster	2
Stun pistol	2
Wookiee bowcaster	4

Only light repeating blasters can be held like an ordinary blaster and fired by one person (use blaster skill). Ω

LEADING EDGE

G A M E S



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CONVENTIONS

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Want to meet hordes of gamers, make new friends and have a great time? Then this summer's convention season is just the thing for you. **Challenge's** Convention '92 insert takes a look at some of the hottest new products available this season (page 48), with a special listing of the summer's conventions (page 49). And for those of you interested in the biggest gaming convention around, we present our special Survivor's Guide to Origins/GEN CON:

Survivor's Guide to Origins/GEN CON

*By Staley File
and Michael Krause*

The Origins/GEN CON gaming convention will attract more than 25,000 people to the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, area in August. Those of you fortunate enough to attend will be faced, not just with the convention scene, but also with a wide variety of hotels, restaurants, nightclubs and other establishments competing for your time and attention. To help make your choices easier, **Challenge** spent a weekend in Milwaukee recently, "casing the joint," so to speak.

RESTAURANTS

Although they don't provide the versatility of New York or Chicago restaurants, Milwaukee's eateries hold their own. German cuisine is, without a doubt, the area's specialty.

Karl Rouchkes: We dined the first evening at one of Milwaukee's better-known German restaurants—Karl Rouchkes. Located just a block away from The Pfister Hotel, Karl Rouchkes places you in a

crowded, uniquely German atmosphere. Decidedly up-scale prices range from \$50 to \$60 for two (includes entrees and appetizers). The service we encountered certainly did not suit the prices, but the visit is worth your time if you're interested in experiencing a different atmosphere and authentic German cuisine. Reservations are highly recommended.

Clock Steak House: The Clock Steak House is a more traditional up-scale dining experience. As a rule, you are required to order an entree from a menu which epitomizes steak house food choices. The cuisine is excellent, with service which is equally impressive.

Calderone Club: Located across from the Hyatt, the Calderone Club is undoubtedly GDW's hot pick for Italian food. Coupled with a family atmosphere, the Calderone Club provides its patrons with generous portions of deliciously unique pastas, served with an unending supply of warm, crusty Italian bread. If Italian pasta is not what you're interested in, the menu offers a wide range of American/Italian entrees,

ranging from veal to seafood. A party of two can enjoy a meal for \$20 to \$40. The service not only tops that of any restaurant we visited, but adds a fun touch when the waitress personally prepares you for your meal by dressing you with a complimentary bib. Be sure and tell Frank that **Challenge** sent you!

Others: Some other eateries include Gus's Mexican Cantina, Chicago's Italian Beef and Sausage, the Metro Cafe and Pieces of Eight.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Those of you who have reserved your hotel space should feel lucky. Rooms for the Origins/GEN CON weekend are going fast, if not already gone.

The Pfister Hotel: The **Challenge** travellers were fortunate to rest their heads at The Pfister for a night. If you're looking to go first class, this is the place for you! Rooms are equipped with a personal bar, complimentary bathrobes, comfortable beds, high ceilings and a distinct old-world charm. The Pfister offers three restaurants, all of varying food

Continued on page 50.

Game Designers' Workshop: For GDW to publish a fantasy roleplaying game, it had to be *great*, and the **Mythus™** game is just that! Designed by Gary Gygax, the **Mythus RPG** is a fantasy *tour de force*, with all of the inventiveness of Gygax's earlier works, plus a game system that simply cannot be beat for flexibility, believability and playability. In fact, the system serves as the core rules for a whole series of roleplaying genres, all part of the **Dangerous Journeys™** series, of which the **Mythus FRPG** is the first release.

Laser Grenadiers: A new set of wargaming rules for 25mm science-fiction miniatures. **Laser Grenadiers** allows players to command and control combined arms forces of futuristic infantry, armored vehicles, artillery and aircraft. The rules include an incredible variety of modern and futuristic weaponry from automatic rifles to particle beams. Optional rules add scanners, repairbots, leaders, morale classes and more. Players can build and use vehicle models of their own design and use any line of science-fiction miniatures. Historical background, campaign rules, technical and tactical notes. Wirebound for easy reference. Godfox Enterprises, PO Box 941699, Atlanta, GA 30341-0699.

Avery Publishing Group: *Ultraterrestrial*: The second Bruce Pennington book from Paper Tiger is a retrospective of this artist's 30-year career. With commentary by Nigel Suckling, this volume covers the fantasy and science-fiction art, haunting architecture and chilling visions of historical futures. *In the Garden of Unearthly Delights*: The first book to present the work of Josh Kirby, a painter of science-fiction book covers for over 25 years. Of special interest to American fans are the creations for the Corgi Editions of Terry Pratchett's Discworld series. Avery Publishing Group, 120 Old Broadway, Garden City Park, NY 11040.

3W: *Modern Naval Battles IV*: The best-selling, award winning *Modern Naval Battles* cardgame series moves into the post-Cold War world. The game features amphibious operations in Third World hot spots, as well as Cold War scenarios. *Salvo*: A low-complexity game of battleship conflict in WWII, featuring actual engagements plus some "what ifs." One map, 200 counters. *The Hundred Years War*: Four battles from the longest-running continuous conflict in history. Based on the popular *Royalists & Roundheads* game system by Rob Markham. Four

maps, 400 counters. *East Front Battles I*: The struggles for Kiev and Rostov in 1941. First in a series of East front battles from noted designer Vance von Borries. Two maps, 400 counters. 3W, PO Box 157, Cambria, CA 93428.

Battle Masters: Milton Bradley expands its adventure game category with *Battle Masters*, an epic game of fantasy battle where mighty armies are locked in conflict. While rich in strategy, *Battle Masters* is easy to play. The game begins by strategically placing ditches, marshes, river fords and the great border tower on the giant battle mat. Draw a card from the battle order deck, then move the corresponding troops. Perhaps your imperial knights will charge or fire your mighty cannon, but beware of the evil ogres closing in on your imperial archers! Capture the border tower or eliminate your enemy's army to prove that you deserve the title of "battle master." Contains more than 100 sculpted figures.

Specialty Book Marketing: *New Kingdom Egypt*: The arms and equipment of the armies of ancient Egypt, the greatest and most enduring of the major powers of the biblical world. Elite 40 series. *Special Forces India*: This volume details the arms, equipment, organization and uniforms of the elite troops of the Indian subcontinent's two most formidable nations. Elite 41 series. *Waterloo 1815—The Birth of Modern Europe*: The battle of Waterloo, the culmination of 25 years of constant warfare, decided the fate of Europe and ended forever Napoleon's dreams of empire. Campaign 15 series. *Kursk 1943—The Tide Turns in the East*: In a titanic clash, the largest tank battle of the Second World War, the Soviet Army smashed the German summer offensive and finally turned the tide on the Eastern front. Campaign 16 series. Specialty Book Marketing, 27 West 20th St., Suite 100, New York City, NY 10011.

The Avalon Hill Game Company: *Gaialcanal*: Fourth in the Smithsonian American History Series. *Across Five Aprils*: Victory Games simulation of entire civil war. *Where's George?: Floating Vagabond* supplement. *Breakaway Hockey*: Stat game with NHL player cards. *S-P Football*: '92 edition with '91 player cards. *Paydirt*: '92 edition with '91 team charts. *Computer Third Reich*: IBM version! *Deluxe Diplomacy*: Up-scaled version with wooden pieces for armies and navies. *In Cold Milk: Cereal Killers: Float-*

ing Vagabond supplement! The Avalon Hill Game Company 4517 Harford Road, Baltimore, MD 21214.

The Heir to the Empire Sourcebook: This *Star Wars* sourcebook features complete information on major characters, Imperial City, the New Republic, and the state of the galaxy after the fall of the Empire! Learn about the New Republic's mysterious and dangerous enemies, including Grand Admiral Thrawn and the Dark Jedi Joruss C'baoth. Descriptions of new alien races, planets, spaceships and equipment. Game statistics are included for all entries. West End Games.

Armado Games: *Ruined Buildings II* (includes houses, church, storage tank and high rise) and Tall Stone Wall Lengths and Corners. Plus a variety of 5mm science-fiction buildings: Senate Building, High Rise, Refinery, Bunker Hill, Mech Factory and Shanty Town. Armado Games, 2263/2265 First St., Schenectady, NY 12303.

ME-PBM: Adventure among the legends and heroes of Middle-earth 1500 years before the War of the Ring! ME-PBM is a simulation of J.R.R. Tolkien's classic confrontation between good and evil. In the game, 10 players of good (Free Peoples) battle 10 players of evil (Dark Servants), while five neutral players ponder when to choose sides. Game Systems Inc., PO Box 160129, Miami, FL 33116-0129.

Mayfair Games: *Magic*: Includes a history of magic in the DC Comics universe, statistics for numerous mythical heroes and villains (some of which have never before appeared in a *DC Heroes* supplement), detailed descriptions of many magical realms and new rules for creating magic-based characters. *More Cosmic Encounter*: Combined with *Cosmic Encounter*, this boxed expansion set reincarnates everything in the original version and its nine supplements, plus at least 25% new material. *Demons*: Describes historical perceptions of demons, their interaction with mortals and much more. *Who's Who #1*: Contains 96 three-hole-punched character sheets designed to fit behind the appropriate DC character's *Who's Who* binder page. Plus roleplaying information, original diagrams, appearance-to-date list for every DC Comics character included. Mayfair Games, Inc., 5641 Howard St., PO Box 48539, Niles, IL 60648.

CHALLENGE Conventions

Westercolt '92, July 2-5 at the Omni Adams, Phoenix, AZ. The 45th Annual Western Regional Science Fiction Convention.

KingCon '92, July 3-5 at the University of Dayton in Dayton, OH. Write to KingCon '92, PO Box 31174, Dayton, OH 45431.

Atlanticon '92, July 3-5 at the University of Maryland, College Park. Write to ADF, Inc., PO Box 91, Beltsville, MD 20704-0091.

Nancon-88 XIV, July 3-5 at the Ramada Hotel Northwest, 12801 Northwest Freeway, Houston, TX 77040. Contact Greater Houston Gaming, Ltd., PO Box 631462, Houston, TX 77263-1462.

III-Kahn, July 10-12 at the Holiday Inn North, Colorado Springs, CO. Write to Miniature Wargamers Guild, 7040 S. Hwy. 85-87, Fountain, CO 80817.

Memphis Fantasy Con '92, July 17-19 at the downtown Radisson Hotel. Write to Memphis Fantasy Con, 4730 Poplar #2, Memphis, TN 38117.

Quincon VII, July 17-19 at the Days Inn, 200 Maine St., Quincy, IL. Send a SASE to Quincon VII, c/o Quincy Hobby Center, 3632 Maine St., Quincy, IL 62301.

Dragon Con '92, July 17-19 at the Atlanta Hilton and Towers, Atlanta, GA. Send a SASE to Dragon Con '92, Box 47696, Atlanta, GA 30362-0696.

Economy Con VI, July 17-19 at the Campus Village West Shopping Center in Phoenix, AZ. Send a SASE to the Roaming Panther Game Company, 4920 West Thunderbird Road #109, Phoenix, AZ 85202.

Cubicon, July 24-26 on the University of Michigan-Dearborn campus Recreation and Organizations Center. Write to Cubicon, c/o SF3, 4901 Evergreen, ROC building, Room 210, Dearborn, MI 48128.

CanGames '92, July 31-August 3 at

the Skyline Hotel in downtown Ottawa, Ontario. Write to CanGames '92, PO Box 3358, Station D, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 6H8.

Origins/GEN CON, Aug. 20-23, at MECCA in downtown Milwaukee, WI. For more information or to receive a copy of the pre-registration brochure, write to Origins/GEN CON Game Fair, PO Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

Con-Spiracy, Aug. 28-30 at the Omni Durham Hotel & Convention Center, 201 Foster St., Durham, NC. Contact Con-Spiracy, c/o NAARP, PO Box 2752, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2752.

San Diego Comic Con, August 1992. Contact Comic Con, PO Box 128458, San Diego, CA 92112-8458.

Gateway 12, Sept. 4-7 at the Los Angeles Airport Hyatt Hotel. Contact Strategicon, PO Box 3849, Torrance, CA 90510-3849.

Texi-Con '92, Sept. 4-7 in Houston, TX. Contact Greater Houston Gaming, Ltd., PO Box 631462, Houston, TX 77263-1462.

Fantasy Fest Fall '92, Sept. 5-7 in Sunbury, PA. Contact A&B Entertainment, PO Box 645, Shamokin Dam, PA 17876.

Operation Green Flag: BattleTech, Sept. 12-13 at the Embers in Carlisle, PA. Contact M. Fonier's Games Only Emporium, 200 Third St., New Cumberland, PA 17070.

22nd Emperor's Birthday Game, Sept. 19-20 at the Century Center in downtown South Bend, IN, across from the Marriott Hotel. Contact Mark Schumaker, PO Box 252, Elkhart, IN 46515.

Oklanomicon Games Show and Convention, Sept. 25-27. Write to Oklanomicon, c/o John Hunter, PO Box 7743, Moore, OK 73159.

Phantasm '92, Oct. 3-4 at the Peterborough Public Library, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada. Write to Phantasm

'92, 276 Parkhill Road West (rear), Peterborough, Ontario, Canada K9H 3H5.

RoVaCon SF, Oct. 2-4. Send a SASE to RoVaCon, PO Box 117, Salem, VA 24153.

Quad Con '92, Oct. 9-11 at Palmer Auditorium, 1000 Brady St., Davenport, IA. Send a large SASE with two stamps to Quad Con '92, The Game Emporium, 3213-23rd Ave., Moline, IL 61265.

NOVAG VII, Oct. 16-18 at the West Park Hotel in Leesburg, VA, less than an hour's drive from Washington, D.C. Contact NOVAG, c/o Ralph Allen, PO Box 122, Sterling, VA 22170.

Con of the Weird and Supernatural (COWS '92), Oct. 31-Nov. 1 at the Embers in Carlisle, PA. Contact M. Fonier's Games Only Emporium, 200 Third St., New Cumberland, PA 17070.

ShaunCon V, Nov. 6-8 at the Roadway Inn, Sixth and Main, Kansas City, MO. Write to the Role-Players Guild of Kansas City, c/o ShaunCon V, PO Box 7457, Kansas City, Mo 64116.

Command.Con.4, Nov. 7 at the cafeteria of St. Louis Community College at Forest Park, 5600 Oakland, St. Louis, MO. Write to Command.Con.4, PO Box 9107, St. Louis, MO 63117.

Lagacon 15, Nov. 7-8, at the Fraternal Order of Eagles, 116 N. 8th St., Lebanon, PA. Contact the Lebanon Area Gamers Association, 806 Cumberland St., Lebanon, PA 17042.

Pentacon VIII, Nov. 14-15 at Grand Wayne Center in downtown Fort Wayne, IN. Contact Steve and Linda Smith, 836 Himes, Huntington, IN 46750.

Announcements cannot be included unless sent in a minimum of four months in advance. Challenge is not responsible for errors in convention announcements. Write to Challenge Conventions, Managing Editor, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.

Continued from page 47.
quality and, of course, expense. Fine dining can be found in the world-renowned English Room, while The Greenery caters to those desiring a quick breakfast or light snack. For entertainment, visit a second lounge, La Playa, located on the top floor next to the hotel's indoor swimming pool.

Hyatt: The Hyatt is a convenient place to stay, especially with its skywalk to the Mecca Center. Here you'll find comfortable rooms and the advantages of a modern-day, business-oriented hotel.

Others: Other places to stay include Ramada Inn, the Marc Plaza Hotel, Holiday Inn, Hotel Wisconsin, Wyndham and more.

NIGHTLIFE

Spending an evening out on the town can be quite an experience. It seems Milwaukee has a nightclub to suit almost everyone's taste.

Club Marilyn: If you're young (or feeling young), Club Marilyn might be what you're looking for. Club

Marilyn has a large dance floor for you to blow off steam to your favorite top-40 hits. It also offers reasonable prices, original art on its walls and large bouncers to keep you in line.

Gas Light East: Across the street from Club Marilyn you'll find the Gas Light East. It offers a much more laid-back scene, pool tables, darts, a jukebox and a friendly barkeep. This is no smoke-filled dive. Try this place—you just might like it.

Bailey's: For those aged 15 to 20, Bailey's offers an evening of fun and socialization.

And More: If you're not travelling by foot, **Challenge** recommends a ride home in a carriage or a cab—both are readily available. Driving is not recommended for an evening on the town for the obvious reasons, and also because of limited parking. You'll find parking spots in Milwaukee to be expensive in the garages and already taken on the streets.

LAST-MINUTE NEEDS

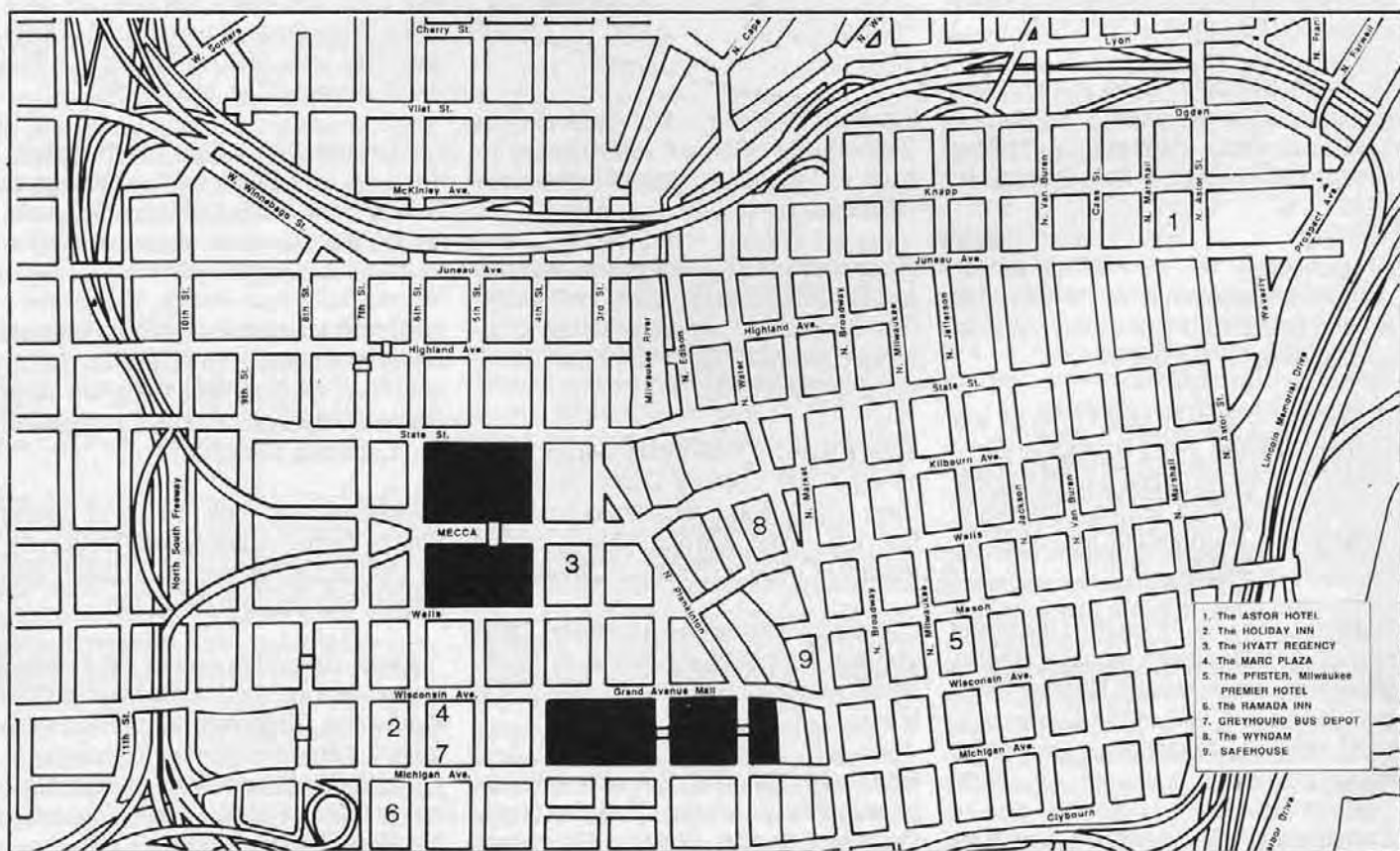
If you lose or forget something

you need, the Plankton Avenue district can be of help. Plankton Avenue is lined with many clothing stores, including Marshall Fields, Banana Republic and Jean Nicole. There are also a wide variety of shops, including Minutemen Press for last-minute photocopies, along this street and adjacent routes.

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

Be sure to stop at one of Milwaukee's many attractions. If it's culture you seek, head over to the Milwaukee Art Museum. For beautiful architecture and a unique shopping experience, stroll historic Jefferson Street between Kilbourn Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue. There's also Discovery World, which puts the world of science, economics and technology at your fingertips.

And if there's one place that's sure to please you, it's the Game Designers' Workshop booth at Origins/GEN CON. Here you'll find all your favorite games, as well as some exciting new ones. Be sure to stop by and say "hello"! Ω



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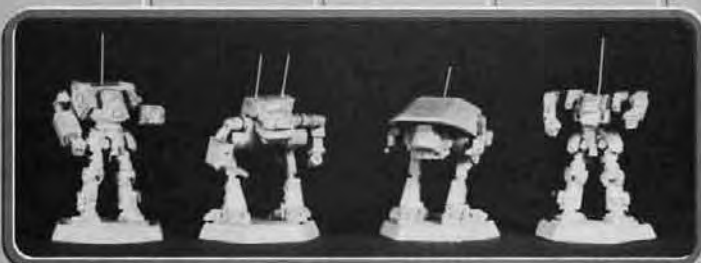


GOJIRA*

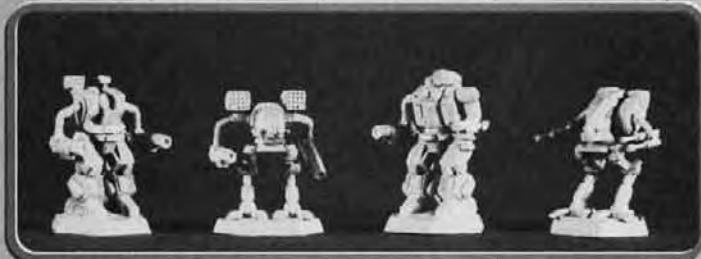
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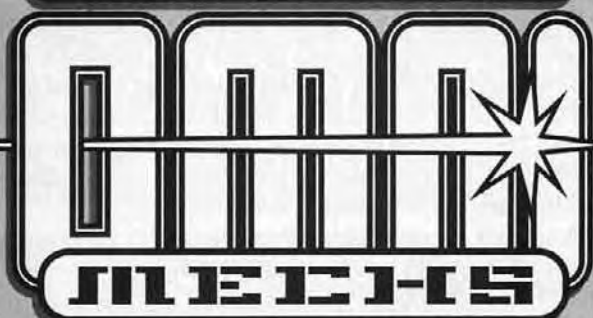


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Pierre Avia, Paris Cedex 15, 75503 France

TRAVELLER *News Service*

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

171-1125

¶Margaret's government responded with concern today to increasing reports of planets whose published world profiles do not correspond to the realities found there. Margaret's officials, citing the danger of such "surprises" to the safety of Imperial citizens, will make a formal request of the Travellers' Aid Society Statistical Office, responsible for establishing and disseminating these profiles, to look into these reports.

¶Reports presented include worlds whose starport capabilities do not live up to their assigned codes, and planets where locally available technology is beneath listed levels. The examples cited are all worlds in areas outside of Margaret's defended frontier, areas being increasingly referred to as the "Outlands" and the "Wilds." It is considered likely that the effects of warfare in these areas have caused these changes, and this theory will be included in the request to the TAS.

¶The TAS will be asked to check into the accuracy of these reports and, if they are found to be true, establish a method to ensure accurate reporting of actual planetary conditions in future publications of world profiles.

¶Most of the reports cited only inconvenience to the travellers themselves, but in some cases merchant ships found themselves stranded on worlds which, unreported in the world profiles, could no longer provide fuel services or starship repair and maintenance.

Exeter/Diaspora (2729 B769895-F)

210-1125

¶Exeter's Federated Shipbuilders, this world's largest trade organization, will close its doors for the last time today, citing its continued existence as "superfluous." This follows the closing last week of Exeter's two largest shipbuilding and repair firms, Kearny Yards and Exeter Shipbuilding and Repair. However, the organization will be survived by a core group of naval architects functioning as the EMMC Office.

¶The EMMC (for "Extemporised Mercantile to Military Conversions") Office is named for the project that it is working to complete, announced by the Federated Shipbuilders on 063-1125. The project calls for the creation of a set of plans which will, when complete, form a standardized set of plans for the conversion or completion of merchant hulls to military standards. The project's name reflects the increasing emphasis given in the plans themselves to the use of standard "off-the-shelf" items available at most starports, rather than specialized components that must be imported.

¶It is still intended that these plans will be widely distributed among the remaining viable shipyards in Diaspora Sector, free of charge, when they are complete.

Tripolis/Verge (2612 B885A98-E)

263-1125

¶A goodwill visit to the restive world of Tripolis by Lady Isis, daughter of Emperor Dulinor, was marred by violence today. Although the world's starport has been closed to all members of the media, the following story of what happened there has been pieced together from interviews with witnesses and the few short official announcements.

¶As part of her tour "to show my father Dulinor's solidarity with you during these difficult times," Lady Isis appeared with the Shaw Hamet, Tripolis head of state, at Sirte Downport. While speaking there, an as-yet unknown number of rioters appeared and, after shouting, "Down with Dulinor," and "Dulinor has brought back the Long Night," began throwing objects, apparently including bottles, garbage, and small fireworks at the dais.

¶Lady Isis, though unhurt, threw herself to the ground to avoid being struck. At the same time, some of the fireworks thrown by the crowd began to go off. Although they were themselves harmless, their reports as Isis fell to the ground caused her personal detachment of bodyguards to conclude that she had been fired on by the crowd. One or more of the high-strung bodyguards returned the supposed fire into the crowd with plasma rifles, eventually killing at least 20, reportedly including many bystanders.

¶The crowd panicked, and many fled the scene, trampling and injuring several dozen more in the process.

¶The only photograph of the event, taken by an unknown photographer at long range, shows Lady Isis with a horrified expression, and with her hallmark fashionable gown spattered with some foreign substance. While some claim that the substance is blood, acquired when Isis waded into the crowd to comfort injured bystanders, others maintain that it is refuse, and she is angered at the damage done to her wardrobe.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

311-1125

¶The Travellers' Aid Society Statistical Office today presented to Margaret's government its report on world profile information published in TAS materials. This report was made in response to a formal request by Margaret's government that the organization look into recent accounts of TAS-published world profiles that did not accurately reflect current conditions on several worlds. The report was filed in the remarkably short time of 140 days, reflecting, in the words of TAS official Eneri Kraus, "the importance of ensuring the safety of not only our members, but of all travellers in Imperial space."

¶The report shows that many worlds show a degradation in starport capabilities, sustainable technology levels, and in some cases, population and atmospheric qualities. The report was clear that in all cases of variance between published figures and reality, it was the conditions on the world that had changed, and not the result of misprinted or mistransmitted world profiles. "What we are seeing here is a very real and tragic decline in the quality of life of Imperial citizens that is so precipitous it has overwhelmed our ability to document it in a timely fashion," said Kraus after the presentation.

¶The report establishes and documents that these changes are all direct or indirect results of Rebellion combat, and are concentrated in disputed areas between factional boundaries that have seen high levels of combat. Merchants operating in these areas

have begun to distinguish between "Outlands," those areas just beyond the defended factional frontiers, and the "Wilds," that remain in the much contested no-man's land between heavily engaged factions.

¶Having identified the astrographic regions that hold the highest probability of rapid world profile change, the TAS can now concentrate field agents in these areas to report changes in world profile codes as quickly as possible. A new system of world profile notation is being introduced, which will show changed digits with *italics*, and a question mark (?) for values that have changed or are changing so rapidly they cannot yet be evaluated.

Vahana/Diaspora (2926 E65A5??-B)

352-1125

¶Six months of sporadic fighting on Vahana is now coming to a close, with an apparent victory for the popular Mariculture Directorate over the so-called Interim Council. The Interim Council, composed of retired military officers, took power following the fighting that destroyed Vahana's starport. Although it repeatedly promised economic programs and an orderly succession of power, the council spent over a year in power delivering only increasingly bombastic demands for belt-tightening and self-sacrifice from Vahana's citizens. That year also saw a sudden decline in the population's health and living standards as distribution networks broke down under the council's interference.

¶The end of fighting follows a brilliant and almost bloodless island-hopping campaign fought mostly by Vahanan volunteers, but led and master-minded by an off-planet mercenary unit. The unit was recruited for this operation by ex-Imperial naval officer Robert R. Rivera, who was hired by the Mariculture Directorate to remove the council. The defeat of the council will clear the way for the directorate's program to reestablish planetary trade networks and restore interstellar trade by creating a "soft" (water) landing starport facility. The directorate also seeks to establish alliance ties with nearby worlds, and the elimination of the insular Interim Council will open the way for these plans.

¶The campaign to overthrow the military government is notable because of the lack of casualties suffered by either side. This was a deliberate goal of Rivera's force, which used technologically sophisticated maneuver tactics to overmatch and overawe its opponents. Rivera appeared yesterday with his second-in-command, Lisa Marlene, to discuss these operations at a brief press appearance. When asked how she felt about the campaign's low casualties, only 83 killed and 349 wounded on both sides in six months of operations that saw over 20,000 prisoners taken, Marlene replied, "We don't feel good about casualties, no matter how low the number. But it is gratifying to know that we kept them from being any higher." Rivera added, "Every life that we take, every building we destroy, will make recovery from the Rebellion that much harder. Killing more people isn't the answer." Rivera also announced that his mercenary unit will remain together under the name Rivera's Vigilantes.

Promise/Diaspora (2827 B542998-C)

045-1126

¶There is a new government today in Diaspora Sector, the Unity of Promise, a confederation of six worlds whose name reflects its leading world as well as the subsector in which it is located. The new polity was announced yesterday by Angeline Beres, the UP's first Minister for State Affairs, and former commander of the Promise planetary navy.

¶The Unity of Promise consists of the six contiguous worlds Lot, Vahana, Udone, Promise, Eloji, and Exeter, which together form 60% of the small Promise main. The group contains two agricultural and one industrial world, and can therefore function as a small self-contained economy. Its military power is based on the Promise planetary navy, whose assets have now been turned over to the Unity of Promise Navy.

¶Beres' statement identified the UP's main policy goal as "the establishment of the force of law in an anarchic region which the major powers have abandoned save for the occasional punitive raid. Power must no longer be held only by those interested in destroying our social and economic infrastructure."

¶Admitting that the re-establishment of order in the region will be difficult, Beres also announced that the UP forces would maintain starmerc units on retainer, to be mobilized as reserve naval forces should the need arise. To further this program, the UP government will subsidize the completion of EMMC (Extemporised Mercantile to Military Conversion) starships for qualified starmerc units who agree serve in this reserve capacity. Rivera's Vigilantes, famous as the liberators of Vahana, are the first such group to apply for this program, and are expected to be rapidly approved and accepted.

Cymbeline/Solomani Rim (2527 A9F4840-E)

091-1126

¶Joshua Dahvin, embattled head of the pan-sophontist faction of the fragmenting Solomani Party, visited Cymbeline today to pay a politically significant visit to the population of intelligent semiconductor microchips that inhabit the volcanic highlands of this world. Although no transcripts or recordings of any discussions have been released, holographs of the meetings show Dahvin speaking to a group of chips hooked into a computer data core.

¶Since the announcement of their discovery by Dr. Arnold Rushorin in 1114, the Solomani Party has carefully refused comment on the significance of the intelligent non-organic beings for the Solomani dogma. The chips present an interesting problem for the dogmatists. While they are not human, leading theories of their evolution show that they are descended from Terran Confederation-manufactured microchips.

¶Informed observers speculate that Dahvin's visit is intended to break the current deadlock in Solomani Party politics caused by the unwillingness of the Humanist and HDV (from the initials Human, Dolphin, Vargr) branches to break from the moderate forces and follow the pan-sophontist leadership in the liberal wing. By invoking the status of the microchips, say these observers, Dahvin hopes to rattle the HDV leaders into examining their current de facto alliance with the Society for the Sovereignty of Man over Machine (SSMM), another moderate faction. The HDV faction cannot easily reject claims for the inclusion of the chips in the Solomani race. For the chips can be described as Terran-originating life forms that attained intelligence with outside intervention just the same as can the Vargr and dolphins. What's more, like the dolphins, the chips are the result of human creation, which carries great weight with some Solomani liberals.Ω

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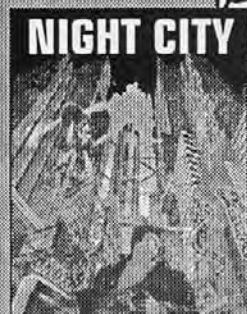
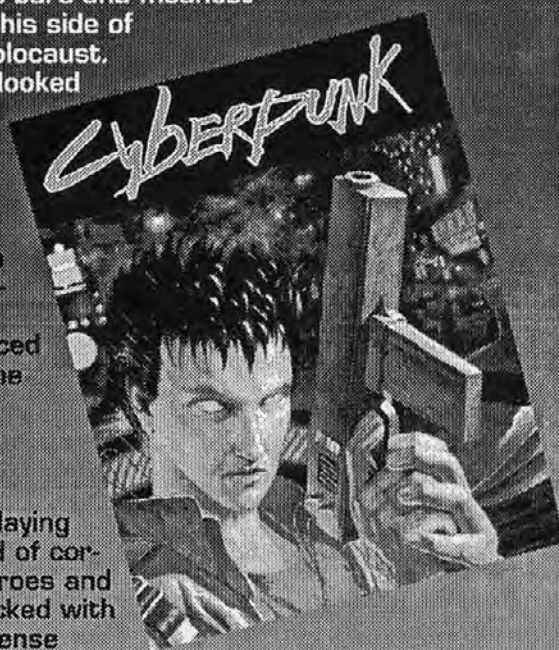
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NIGHT CITY



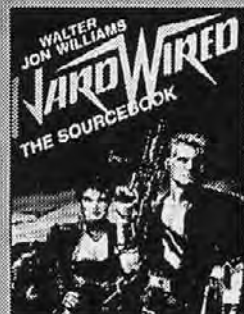
FORLORN HOPE



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FORLORN
HOPE

By
Patrick Sheats
and
Andrew Cather

Continued on page 56.

Challenge 62 55

The Night City Division of Trauma Team International (TTI) has been having problems. Due to the extremely high violent crime rate in the city and the popularity of TTI's services, the corporation has been desperately short of field personnel. As a result, TTI has been hiring just about anyone who comes in off the street and can show some skill appropriate to the job. A trauma team consists of the following positions:

Medical Specialists: The job of the medical specialist is not to heal wounded clients, but to stabilize the client's wounds and keep the client alive until the ambulance arrives at the Trauma Center. There are at least two medical specialists on board. The senior specialist is the vehicle commander and must be a Medtechie character. The other specialist can be any character type, but must have a First Aid skill of 4 or better. The senior medtech gets 2500 euro per week, while the junior medtech gets 2000 euro per week.

Security Specialists: There are at least two of these on board. They are responsible for the safety of the vehicle and crew during operations. Often, they must escort the medical specialists through dangerous areas to retrieve clients in locations that the AV-4 cannot reach. They are the most expendable members of the crew.

Security specialists can be of any character type, although Solos are preferred. They must be qualified for use with small arms and heavy weapons. Each is paid 1000 euro per week.

Pilot: The ambulance has only one pilot's station, so there is no copilot. Most TTI pilots are war veterans and consequently have psychological problems from the wars that manifest themselves at inconvenient moments.

The pilot can be of any character type, but Nomads are generally the most qualified for this work. The character should have a minimum Pilot skill of 3. The pilot is paid 1600 euro per week.

Crew Chief: The crew chief sits in the gunner's position, to the right of the pilot. The crew chief operates the nose-mounted minigun, and can drop the napalm or tear-gas canisters (although he must have permission from the senior medtech to do so). The crew chief is also responsible for maintenance of the vehicle and must keep the vehicle flying under the worst conditions.

The crew chief must have skills in Basic Tech, AV Tech and Heavy Weapons. Techies with combat experience are preferred for this kind of work. Crew chiefs are paid 1300 euro per week.

VEHICLE

The McDonnell-Douglas AV-4 is the first

aerodyne ever produced for the mass market. An aerodyne is a vehicle that relies on its engine's thrust to keep it aloft. When first introduced, the AV-4 revolutionized the field of close air support. In civilian service, they have proven effective in both crowd control and emergency medical response.

Unfortunately, an AV-4 requires enormous amounts of fuel and maintenance, and its life tends to be short due to enormous stresses placed on the aircraft. When they were introduced in 1993, most AV-4s worked well. By 2020, they have been overhauled and refurbished so many times that they have developed quirks and peculiarities as unique as their human crews.

The AV-4 the PCs are assigned to is Unit 17, also known by its call sign, "Boogie Chillun." It is a patchwork of dull steel, with blackened exhaust ports, dented and banged-up landing skids, and various chainsaw scars and bullet holes marking the exterior. Just keeping this vehicle in the air is sometimes a challenge.

Whenever the vehicle undergoes serious stress (such as a Difficult or worse Piloting skill check), or for every four hours that the vehicle does not have routine maintenance, the referee should roll 1D6. On a roll of 1, roll 1D6 again and check the Random Malfunctions Table on the following page.

EQUIPMENT

All equipment is the property of TTI. If any of it is lost, the value of the equipment will come out of the character's paycheck. Standard equipment for all trauma team AV-4s is as follows:

One M134 minigun mounted in nose turret; an internal munitions rack containing four five-liter napalm canisters and four tear-gas canisters; one M60 light machinegun in door mount; one cryotank; one stretcher/gurney; six medkits; supply cabinets containing SpraySkin, slap patches and airhypos of various drugs (including heavy drugs—the vehicle contains millions of euro worth of drugs); two medscanners; two drug analyzers; two dermal staplers; two boxes of StripTape binders; tech tool kit; electronics kit; two flashlights; four ropes; four rappelling harnesses; four sets of LI goggles; four Militech Ronin light assault rifles with five clips of ammunition each; and six nylon helmets, each marked with a red cross.

Each trauma team field operative is issued a communications headset (acts as pocket commo) that is linked to the vehicle's radio, enabling all communications to be monitored by dispatch (unless the vehicle's operator turns off the radio, which is usually against company policy and can result in suspension from duty). Operatives are also issued flak vests with the red cross and red-and-white TTI logo on them. Security spe-

cialists may request doorgunner's vests.

TTI uniforms are optional, but all team members must display the red cross on the upper half of the body. TTI will provide adhesive patches with the symbol to anyone who request it. Those saying they will have red crosses tattooed on their heads should be dropped out of the ambulance at 1000 meters altitude.

WORKING FOR A LIVING

After a short training period, the PCs are assigned a standard aerial patrol route, which they must fly, on call, for four hours, starting at 4 p.m. At 8 p.m. they are allowed a one-hour food/maintenance break. They must work until 1 a.m., when they return to the Trauma Center and punch out. Of course, if casualties are pouring in (as they usually are in Night City), the characters may be pressed into additional service.

Most of the situations during the shift are fairly routine—traffic accidents and the like. Several situations, however, require special attention.

Old Soldiers Never Die

The Forlorn Hope is a well-known hangout for war veterans, located in the south-side slum areas. It also happens to be near Boostergang turf, and the patrons often start "brawls" with the local gangs, resulting in substantial property damage and loss of life. A broken card call at the Forlorn Hope usually means a desperate situation for the team.

Sure enough, the PCs are called to the Forlorn Hope. Once they arrive on scene, the PCs see several vets engaged in close combat with members of the Icemen, a local Boostergang that has come here looking for trouble. The Icemen are distinguished by their extremely pale skin, shaven heads and ragged white clothes. Several bodies are already sprawled on the pavement. Once the characters report on local conditions, they will be given permission to "clear the area."

If the PCs use the minigun, a few of the Boosters will feign death, then wait for the ambulance to land. They will then attack any PCs outside the vehicle. Those with ranged weapons will attempt to take out the doorgunner. Then they will try to board the ambulance and take it over (remember the large drug supply on board). None of them knows how to fly, of course, so they will simply wind up crashing the vehicle and destroying themselves.

Unfortunate Happenstance

The PCs get a broken card call from a Gold Card holder at the Atlantis, an up-scale corporate hangout in the downtown area.

Random Malfunctions

Roll Result

- 1-2 **Power bleed.** The vehicle suffers a loss of power, and the engine sputters. Reduce top speed by 1D6x10%. If not repaired within 10 minutes, the engine will fail, and the vehicle will drop like a stone. Repair is a Difficult task.
- 3-4 **Fuel leak.** Pretty routine. The PCs have 10 minutes to land the vehicle. Calling a TTI refueler will allow the ship to refuel within 10 minutes. Of course, landing could be inconvenient, especially during rush hour. Repair is an Average task.
- 5 **Control systems malfunction.** The ship's thrust fans start turning in a random fashion, causing the ship to veer and buck like a wild animal. This continues until repairs are made from the cockpit or until the vehicle crashes. Trying to fly the vehicle straight is a Very Difficult task. Repair is Difficult.
- 6 **Engine fire.** Apilot's worst nightmare. The vehicle suffers a power bleed, as above, and the fire must be extinguished within five turns. After that, roll 1D6 every turn, adding +1 for each turn the fire is not extinguished. On a roll of 6+, the vehicle explodes. Fire extinguishers on the engine have three shots. Each time they are used, roll 1D6. On a roll of 1-2, the fire goes out. On a 3-6, explosion is delayed for five turns, after which the fire extinguishers may be used again.

The PCs will have to land in front of the building and disembark to retrieve the client. The client is John Burkhalter, a corporate who has choked on a piece of gristle and passed out. A routine call.

As it happens, however, Burkhalter is also the target of a rival corporation's hit team positioned at the bar. When Burkhalter started choking, the Solos in the team started getting nervous. If Burkhalter dies of choking, their employer is under no obligation to pay them, and the entire job vanishes into thin air. They decide to take action just as the PCs enter the room, so the PCs will find themselves caught up in a crossfire in the middle of the Atlantis. Burkhalter, meanwhile, continues to turn blue.

There are four members of the hit team;

Burkhalter has two bodyguards sitting with him. All are Solos.

The layout of the Atlantis is shown in *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*, page 188. Burkhalter and his bodyguards are in the large booth in the southeast corner of the bar, while the hit team takes up position behind the bar.

Smart PCs will realize that the crossfire is intense, and the hit team seems pretty dedicated. On the other hand, large plate-glass windows near the booth have been shattered by the gunfire; this might give the PCs a hint that going outside and removing Burkhalter through the windows would be a better idea.

Best in Home Security

The PCs are directed to pick up a client in Westover Tower, an 80-story apartment complex at the northeast corner of Sterling and Westover streets. It is known as a fairly expensive place to live, with good security systems. After the PCs contact building security, they are cleared to land on the roof, where they are met by security guards who update them on the situation.

The client is a wealthy and rather paranoid netrunner who has rewired her floor's security systems, disconnecting them from the central security office and linking them into her own terminal. Apparently, she has suffered some kind of severe neural damage (from tangling with some Black Ice in the Net) and has left her terminal in command of the security systems on her floor. The building security guards have no idea how to get onto the floor, and although they have called their support services to undo the damage, these will not arrive for 15 minutes.

Computer: The woman's computer has two CPUs, with eight memory units containing Databaser, Genie and Dee-2 controller programs, plus Knockout, an antipersonnel program (*Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*, page 130). There is also a one-MU program that is not labeled. When this program is opened, it turns out to be a set of controller instructions, designed to access the controller menu and substitute itself for the netrunner while it is running. This allows the netrunner to do other things, like lay unconscious on her apartment floor.

If no netrunner is available, a Techie can try to jury-rig a direct hookup into the building's security systems to allow elevator access to the floor (currently, the controller program has locked off the floor from elevator access). Once this is done, the PCs will have to deal with the robots.

Robots: Two robots are on this floor, both standard cleaning 'bots modified to carry micromissile launchers (*Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*, page 82). One robot has exited the apartment and taken position in the hallway, while the other remains in the apartment

near the netrunner's body. The moment the PCs step off of the elevator into the hallway, the first robot will attack. The other will attack anyone entering the apartment. If a netrunner has not already disabled the controller program, doing so after the PCs enter the floor does no good, since the 'bots carry out their last instructions. Also, the controller program has to be disabled in order to prevent the SP 20 steel door from being closed and locked (bypassing the lock is a Very Difficult Electronic Security task).

The robots are 0.75 meters high, and each has a Movement Allowance of 2 with its tracks. Each has an SP of 10 and an SDP of 20. The robots fire one round at each target until they run out of ammo. The missile launchers are mounted on the robots' cleaning arms, which have been modified to have a REF of 9. Each 'bot has Handgun skill at level 2.

If a robot is hit, roll 1D6. On a roll of 1, the robot's control center is hit, and if the damage penetrates the casing, the 'bot is out of business.

If the PCs are unaware of the robots when they step into the hallway, they will be ambushed, and the hallway robot will gain a +5 bonus for ambush on that turn.

By the time the PCs get to the client (if ever), determine her Death State by rolling 1D10+4. Of course, if she is a 10 or above, she cannot be saved. Such is the price of paranoia.

Ambush at the Park

The PCs get a broken card call at Lake Park. When they arrive, they find the card's signal, but they do not see a body. Circling around, they find nothing, but they are ordered to land and investigate. When they land, they find the broken card, but no body.

As the PCs investigate, the vehicle crew hears a sharp thud from the roof, as if something fell onto it. At that moment, the cockpit control board suddenly sparks and pops, and all cyberware goes dead. The team has been hit by an EMP grenade (*Chromebook*, page 47), and everyone within the vehicle suffers this effect. Any PCs more than two meters from the vehicle, they are unaffected.

When everyone comes to, they see six Boosters from the Blood Razor gang charging toward the vehicle. The Boosters are heavily armed, and they intend to slaughter the crew and take the valuable drug supply on board. The AV's avionics have been disrupted by the EMP, and the vehicle will be unable to lift off until backup systems are switched on by the pilot and/or crew chief, which is an Average task for AV Pilot skill. Since the minigun is mounted on the chin of the vehicle, it will have to make do with personal weapons. Have fun. Ω

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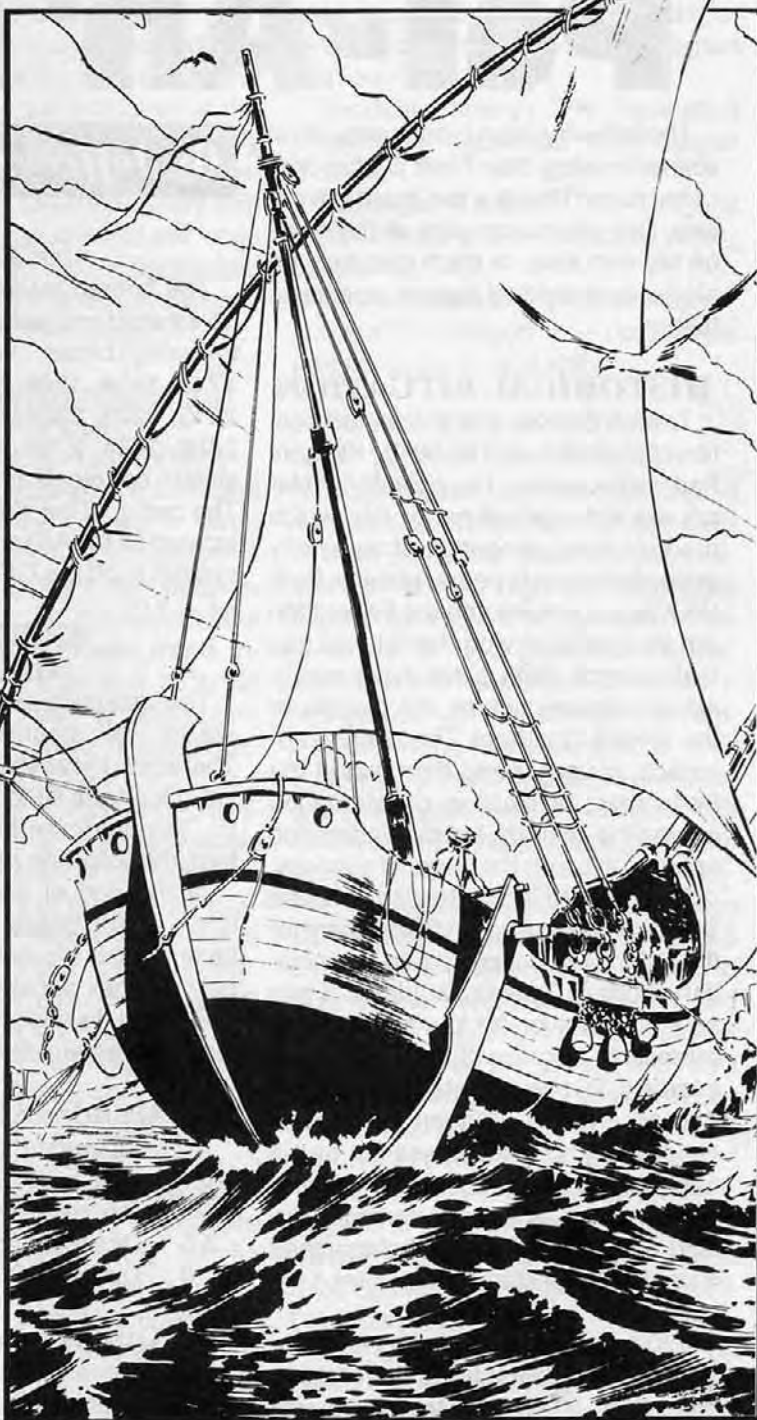
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Pel-Ah' Incident

The following is an introductory-level scenario using *Star Fleet Battles Volume I* rules. This is a two-team adventure. One player can play all the ships on his own side, or each ship may be played by individual players working in teams.

HISTORICAL SITUATION

Telarak Quadrant is a disputed section of space located along the Klingon/Federation border. The planets of Telarak are rich agricultural worlds which produce vast amounts of specialty grains for export to poorer planets. Both the Klingon Empire and the Federation are attempting to woo the Telaraki into their control. Both sides have established outposts among the planets of the Telarak Quadrant. The Klingon approach, more ruthless than that of the Federation, is causing consternation among the Telaraki, but the Federation appears to be on the verge of success.

The Federation established Base Station 31 in the Agoran Star system for the purpose of supporting its colonization efforts in Telarak Quadrant. It has been in operation for four months, and represents a grave threat to Klingon interests in the planets of the inner Agoran System. Klingon emissaries have denounced the presence of the base station as a precursor to Federation invasion. As a result, tensions are high, and the Federation has dispatched a small force of starships to defend the station.

A Klingon commander, Pel-Ah' (pronounce "ah" like the German "ach"), has been dispatched to the Telarak Quadrant to handle the situation. He is known for his ruthlessness and cunning. The Federation expects trouble.

By Jeffrey Groteboer

SETUP

The Agoran asteroid belt consists of 18 asteroid counters. Place them in the following hexes: 1621, 1708, 1713, 1717, 1904, 1926, 2019, 2110, 2206, 2213, 2223, 2302, 2317, 2521, 2612, 2626, 2704, 2708. A Federation base station counter is placed in hex 1303. The center of the system (in-system) is located off the A/D end of the map. Out-system is off the C/F end.

SPECIAL RULES

The asteroids and the base station are in orbit around the star Agoran. Therefore, they move in a slow arc from top (Quadrant B) to bottom (Quadrant E). To randomize the movement pattern, the following rules will be used:

At the end of each turn, after the bookkeeping phase, asteroids and the base station are moved. Each moves only one hex per turn.

Roll one die and consult the following tables for asteroids/base stations:

Quadrants A, B, C

Roll	Movement of Asteroid/Base Station
1-2	Direction E
3-5	Direction D
6	Direction C

Quadrants D, E, F

Roll	Movement of Asteroid/Base Station
1	Direction E
2-4	Direction D
5-6	Direction C

When an asteroid reaches hex row 30 or 31, move it to row one of the same column. (For example, an asteroid in hex 1829 rolls a 3. It moves in direction D into hex 1830. It is immediately removed and placed in hex 1801.)

When the base station reaches row 30 or 31, or reaches column 43 (off the out-system map-edge), the game is over. The base station may rotate as specified within the rules, but may not otherwise move except as described in these special rules.

The following rules from *Star Fleet Battles Volume I* are not in effect in this scenario (unless otherwise agreed upon): C9.0, D3.6, E5.0, G6, G7.8, G12.0, J2, J3, J4, and all commander's level rules. All other rules, including advanced and optional rules, are available for play.

FEDERATION SPECIAL RULES

The following is confidential information for the Federation player(s). In preparing for a scenario, the referee should show this information only to players of the appropriate side.

The Federation is intent on developing the planets of Telarak into full members, but the Klingons must be driven out first. The Federation intends to do this in the standard manner—by showing the citizens of Telarak that the Federation ways are peaceful and more prosperous. The Klingons are expected to take an aggressive stance against the presence of Base Station 31.

In Agoran, Base Station 31 supports freighters and cargo ships which bring supplies to Agoran and nearby star systems, and which export grains from the Telarak planets. It is only lightly

armed, with three photon torpedoes. Shields and light armor are its only defenses. It is to be protected from Klingon attack.

At the start of the game, 1D3 nonmilitary ships will be on the map. Their movements are controlled by the referee. One of the ships must be docked at the base station. The referee will determine the exact nature of the nonmilitary ships at the start of the game.

Base Station 31 is defended by a Federation light cruiser. A Federation scout will be docked at the base station for R & R.

A *Constitution*-class heavy cruiser is the mainstay of the Federation forces in Telarak. Unfortunately, due to the needs of the entire system, the cruiser, USS *Saratoga*, does not begin in the Agoran System.

Rules of Engagement

The following is confidential information for the Klingon player(s). In preparing for a scenario, the referee should show this information only to players of the appropriate side.

Federation forces are prohibited from firing the first shot. If attacked, they may return fire until enemy forces withdraw.

They may escort the enemy forces to the edge of the Agoran System.

Use of the nonviolent combat principle is mandatory unless a Federation ship/base station is destroyed. The Federation on-scene commander may remove the NVC at that point, if desired.

The order of on-scene command is as follows: heavy cruiser CO, light cruiser CO, base station commander, scout CO.

Initial Placement of Forces

The light cruiser may be placed anywhere within quadrants A or D. The scout begins the game docked at the base station in hex 1303. The heavy cruiser begins the game in another system (off the map). One nonmilitary ship begins the game docked at the base station. The other two, if applicable, begin the game in a random location to be determined by the referee.

Availability/Deployment of Forces

The light cruiser is ready for action. The scout will assemble its crew upon the detected arrival of two or more Klingon ships in the Agoran System. It will begin undocking procedures if the Klingons move inside the asteroid belt or upon commencement of hostilities.

The heavy cruiser, USS *Saratoga*, will come to the aid of the Agoran System if any Federation ship or station calls for aid. Federation ships may only call for aid if they are attacked. If the base station is attacked, it will call for aid automatically. It will require 2D6 turns for the *Saratoga* to arrive (the referee will roll).

Federation ships begin the scenario at the following weapons status: The base station,

light cruiser, scout and nonmilitary ships begin at Weapons Status 0.

The heavy cruiser, upon its arrival in the Agoran System, will be at Weapons Status III. All Federation vessels may change to Weapons Status I (Yellow Alert) in response to Klingon arrival in the Agoran System.

Victory Conditions

The scenario ends when either side's victory conditions are met or when the base station reaches row 30 or 31, or reaches column 43 (off the out-system map-edge).

Tactical Victory: The Federation keeps the Klingons out of the Agoran System.

Strategic Victory: The Klingons achieve none of their Strategic victory conditions.

Strategic Loss: The Federation destroys all the Klingon forces but suffers no destroyed military ships.

KLINGON SPECIAL RULES

The Humans are intent on developing the planets of Telarak into full members of the Federation. This is intolerable, and the Klingon High Command has dispatched Pel-Ah' to solve the situation. Pel-Ah' is a good commander, leading his D-7-class cruiser in numerous battles. On this mission, he commands, for the first time, a battle force consisting of two D-7-class cruisers and one E-4-class escort. The Klingon High Command will support any action he takes.

In the Agoran System, a Federation base station supports freighters and cargo ships which bring supplies to Agoran and nearby star systems, and which export grains from the Telarak planets. It is an old design, with light arms and armor. That design of the station is known to carry either three phasers or three photon torpedoes.

There is likely to be a small number of freighters in the Agoran System. The Klingon High Command would like them to be destroyed or captured if the tactical situation permits it.

The base station is believed to be defended by a Federation light cruiser. A Federation heavy cruiser is believed to be in the quadrant and may respond should a battle break out.

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Rules of Engagement

It is believed by the Klingon High Command that the Federation will not provoke an attack. It is in the best interest of the Klingons to force a situation. A quick, decisive battle which results in the destruction of the base station is deemed appropriate.

Initial Placement of Forces

The Klingon forces begin in the outer system, anywhere in columns 40-42.

Availability/Deployment of Forces

The Klingon forces consist of two standard D-7 battlecruisers and one standard E-4 escort.

Klingon ships begin the scenario at Weapons Status II.

Victory Conditions

Tactical Victory: The Klingons destroy or drive all Federation forces from the Agoran System, or the Klingons destroy the Federation base station.

Strategic Victory: The Klingons capture the base station or a Federation ship. Ω

"Pel-Ah' Incident" was created for informal tournament play in conjunction with Trekfest '90 in Riverside, Iowa. Every year, Riverside holds a birthday party on March 22 and Trekfest on the last Saturday in June to commemorate the future birth of James T. Kirk in the year 2228.



By Erick Melton

The Texas National Bureau of the Spacelanes Activity Monitoring Network (SAMN) is looking for starship crews to help establish an independent monitoring system (IMS). The pay is good—twice standard pay rates, plus a bonus equal to 6000 livres when the assignment is completed. Members of the Texas Space Military will receive normal pay, but will get other bonuses in the form of promotions and official commendations.

The characters will need a good mix of space crew skill, with special emphasis on Pilot, Sensor, Communications and EVA. Former pirate/hijackers, especially those who served as spikers (cybernetic specialists in boarding and infiltration), will have an advantage. The characters can be members of the Texas National Space Guard, on assignment with Texas National Bureau.

The adventure begins in the Texas Colony on Austin's World, in the DM-3 1123 system. The players are to form the leading members of starship crew whose job is to seed a number of systems with passive grav scanners as part of SAMN's independent monitoring system. The system, a series of automated sensor buoys, will give the interstellar crime-fighting organization good, solid data on the general traffic pattern in systems where there is a high incidence of pirate activity.

To seed a system, an EVAteam is sent out to select and coat an asteroid with a ceramic resin. This helps mask the scanner from easy detection and also serves as a long-term power source. Once the resin hardens, crystal circuits form and allow the sensor to use it as a solar panel. After the vessel has left, nanomotes, tiny robots the size of molecules, use the asteroid's material to replicate themselves and construct the sensor unit. Several such asteroids are seeded, each set of nanomotes programmed with a different timing sequence. This allows the sensors to periodically conceal themselves, literally taking themselves apart, while still keeping the system under scan. In this way, SAMN hopes to prevent cheap detection of the sensor platforms by the pirate syndicates. The timing sequence, as well as the orbital data of the seeded asteroids, is coded on a set of computer chips and stored at SAMN's central bureau. Courier vessels will be periodically dispatched to pick up the stored sensor data.

After a training period of three weeks, the PCs are assigned to seed passive scanners in systems which are noted for a high level of pirate activity or which, by their position in the star field, are suspected of harboring a catch and carry team's dock-rock—a small asteroid modified by a pirate syndicate to serve as a rest stop, parts storage facility and long-term sensor buoy.

The PCs will travel aboard a *Yellow Rose*-class courier vessel, a scaled-up version of the *Hayabusa*-class courier, with a crew of six, 100 CUM of cargo and three-week endurance when fitted with an EDM. The PCs' vessel is also fitted with a pop-out drone, an automated remote designed to secure sensitive data in the event of being boarded by firing it on a pre-planned trajectory.

MONTANA AND MEXICAN INTERVENTION

The PCs' assignment is to head toward the Qingyuan system via Omicron 2 Eridani and Epsilon Eridani. Since the Mexican and Argentine governments have made it clear that they will not provide any assistance for the IMS, the Texas and Manchurian national bureaus have come to an agreement to jointly seed the routes of the Latin Finger. The PCs will proceed to Omicron 2 Eridani, where they will assist Manchurian vessels in seeding that system.

After they acquire the subluminal horizon of the Omicron 2 Eridani (Montana), the PCs' vessel is approached by a Mexican patrol vessel. The *Yellow Rose* is boarded and searched for "contraband material." While such a search is nominally allowed by the Melbourne Accords, it is clear to the PCs that the Mexicans are merely trying to harass them and make their life difficult. The PCs can only keep quiet and wait it out.

The PC in charge of the ship should roll the following task for every half-hour the naval personnel are on-board:

Task: To keep crew patient during search: Difficult, Leadership or Psychology, Determination. Special.

Referee: Failure means some incident has taken place which greatly increases the volatile nature of the event—all rolls are one level higher from that point on. A mishap means violence of some sort has broken out, and the vessel is immediately impounded.

Three hours after the search begins, a Manchurian patrol vessel comes on the scene to "assist" the Mexican patrol, and the PCs are finally allowed to proceed to the station to begin their support of the Manchurian seeding operations. As long as they remain in-system, however, they are followed by Mexican agents and patrol craft.

QINGYUAN AND THE BOGEY

When they complete their work with the Manchurian seeding operations, the PCs resupply and head for the Qingyuan system, known to harbor pirate dock-rocks. Once finished, they will return through Epsilon Eridani to Austin's World.

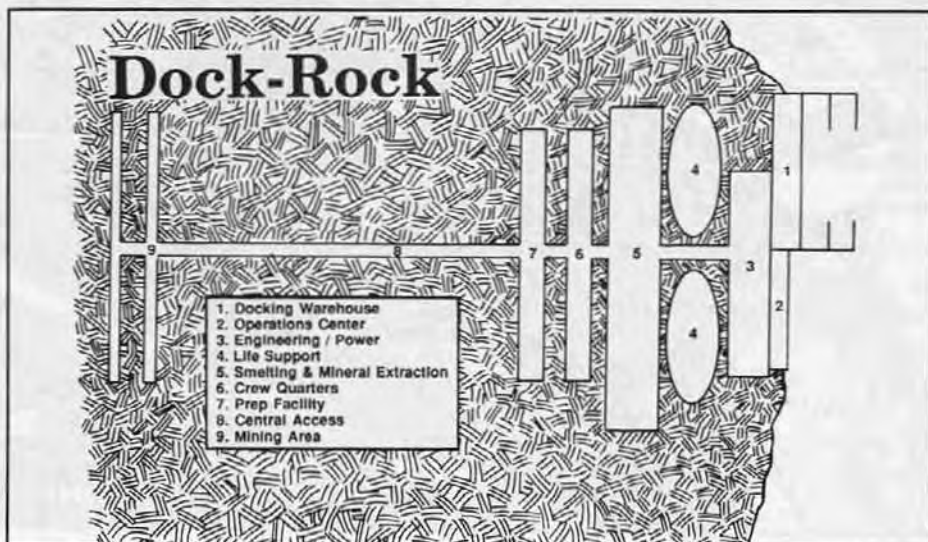
Along a secondary route in the Chinese Arm, Qingyuan is a relatively uninteresting system with no permanent habitation. The only activity, besides the original exploration teams, was an attempt by a Mexican mining company to develop the asteroid mineral wealth. The plan proved untenable, and the company folded.

A day after arriving in-system, the PCs have a long-range sensor contact. The grav scan shows a stutterwarp trace heading from an Epsilon Eridani insertion toward the inner system. If they hail the vessel, they receive a transmission from an independent research vessel. The time lapse will not permit any in-depth conversation.

If the PCs are monitoring the scan, they may notice a scan anomaly, as the vessel is actually an armed courier shadowing the PCs (use the *Thorez*-class courier as a guide), and it has launched a decoy-drone (dee-dee) in order to rendezvous with a dock-rock in the system. The PCs should roll the following task to determine if they catch the anomaly:

Task: To detect a dee-dee launch: Variable, Uncertain, Sensors. Instantaneous.

Referee: The level of difficulty is dependent on whether or not the bogey succeeds in launching the decoy-drone. If the dee-dee



launch is successful, then the task is Difficult. If it was a simple failure, the task is Routine. If a mishap occurred, detection is Simple.

Over the next several days, the PCs pick up sporadic sensor contacts. At first intermittent and at extreme range, they grow in strength and proximity. Any attempts to communicate get no response. The nature of the bogey's activity points toward one obvious conclusion—the unknown is a pirate catch vessel, trying to discover the locations of the sensor units in-system.

The vessel is sanctioned by Instituto Nacional de Astronomia (INAP) and manned by agents from the covert operations section. Commanding the courier vessel is Jose Martin DeSilva, from Argentina's piracy suppression squadron. DeSilva's fiercely ambitious nature, combined with his high degree of skill, has lifted him through the ranks in a very short time. DeSilva knows the IMS is no real threat to his nation's security, but to fulfill his goal of moving to the peak of the Argentine military hierarchy, he must please his superiors in this regard. DeSilva is an Elite space military NPC, while his crewmembers are Experienced space military NPCs.

ATTACK

The sensor contacts continue through the first week in-system. At a time when they are vulnerable, such as when they are at all-stop to allow for EVA operations, the PCs detect two contacts bearing on them at high speed. Anyone manning the communications station will detect high-speed telemetry indicative on in-flight course corrections to a remote. The PCs are under attack.

In fact, this apparent attack is a ruse. DeSilva is hoping to drive the PCs out of the system before they have completed their assignment. The PCs should roll the following task:

Task: To analyze the catch vessel attack: Formidable. Computer or Tactics. 5 minutes.

No matter what tactics the PCs use, they will appear to be successful, as DeSilva will call off the attack after detonating two obsolete missiles, both targeted to miss the PCs' vessel.

Several days after the initial attack, if the PCs remain in-system, DeSilva will strike again. This time he will be swift and deliberate in his attempts to disable the PCs' vessel and take them prisoner. The PCs have three basic courses of action to consider:

All-Out Defense: This is the most obvious action to take, but it is also the least likely to succeed. The PCs will be in a damaged vessel, far from any assistance, outnumbered against a well-trained foe.

Counter-Boarding: The PCs may attempt to board the attacking vessel while their ship is being attacked. This tactic requires a high degree of skill and training, the type normally possessed by marines or legionnaires, and failure would leave the characters in a worse situation than before.

Delaying Action: The PCs' number one concern is to prevent the orbital and timing data for the sensor buoys from being captured. They may want to plan some delaying action while they use the vessel's pop-out drone or dump the information into the cerba-comp of a party member.

DOCK-ROCK

If DeSilva is successful in capturing the PCs' ship, he will place a prize crew on the vessel to take it to the INAP dock-rock, actually the main facility of the failed mining company. There, the PCs will be searched thoroughly enough to turn up any weapons or equipment they may have on their person. Any bionic or cybernetic augmentation will remain unnoticed. DeSilva plans to search the PCs' vessel for the orbital data for the sensor units, or the recovery signal for the pop-out drone, if it was used. He will then wait for his carry vessel, an Argentine freighter scheduled to arrive within two days, and set the PCs adrift in an escape capsule off a regular travel route.

The PCs and crew are thrown into a locker room on the mining level of the facility, in the prep module, kept at 0G to reduce power consumption. Eight locker units are staggered across the center of the room, each with four triangular-shaped lockers containing a rack, shelf and personal storage drawer. Power and air leads from the facility's main supply were designed to recharge the P-suit and equipment contained in each locker. The sides of the lockers are covered in graffiti, written in Spanish, which confirms that this is the ready room of an asteroid mining facility apparently abandoned several years ago.

If the PCs search their enclosure, they will discover six belter-style P-suits (integrity unknown), two damaged autojacks, one box of Stik-kit patches (25 patches, 100-kilogram holding strength) and individual tools to form a combination basic and electrical tool kit.

P-Suits: The P-suits are a heavily padded variety, of a style favored by belters. Due to the years of disuse, they have developed weakened joint seals. If the PCs do not inspect the suits, or if they miss the worn-out seals, the seals may fail while in use.

Roll 1D10 if the PCs attempt any activity in a suit without repairing the damaged seals. On a 7+, the seal fails, and the suit starts losing atmosphere. If the activity was particularly strenuous, the referee may choose to add a modifier as high as +3. A swear 'n' tear patch will slow down such a leak but will not stop it, and a Stik-kit patch cannot be properly molded to the suit while someone is wearing it.

One way to check suit integrity before use is to over-pressurize the suit, hooking it up to the air supply in one of the lockers and inflating it to twice the recommended level (specified on the inside collar tab of each suit). However, this sudden drain on the air supply will almost certainly alert anyone watching the status boards in the facility's operations center. If the PCs do not consider this possibility, they may find an armed detachment bursting in on them in a few minutes.

Another way to check suit integrity is to hand inspect the suits:

Task: To inspect a P-suit: Routine, Uncertain. P-Suit. 2 minutes.

Once the weakened seals are discovered, they can be repaired by using two Stik-kit patches, one on the inside and one on the outside of the suit.

Autojacks: The autojacks are a form of specialized mining equipment for 0G mining, using a high-intensity laser in combination with a high-speed drill. Each autojack comes with a harness that fits around a suited miner. There are no spare parts available to fix the two damaged autojacks, but by cannibalizing them, the PCs may be able to construct a crude laser cutting torch.

Task: To diagnose autojack damage: Difficult. Mechanical and Electronic repair. 3 minutes each.

Task: To build a cutting tool: Formidable. Mechanical and Electronic Repair. 12 minutes.

Referee: If a major mishap is rolled, then the spare parts are damaged, and the cutting torch cannot be completed. If a minor mishap or superficial damage is rolled, then the character must check his determination. If he is successful and completes the task, then the cutting tool is finished, but at a higher chance of failure. This represents the PCs' attempts to force a slightly damaged part to work. Roll 1D10 for every five minutes the cutting tool is used. On a 10, the tool fails, and the PCs can attempt to rebuild it by

The PCs detect two contacts bearing on them at high speed....

rerolling the above task. A tool rebuilt once will fail on a roll of 6+. A tool rebuilt more than once is damaged permanently. If the spare parts were already damaged when they were discovered, add 1 to all task rolls.

With the makeshift cutting torch, the PCs can cut into the control access plate next to the doors, then open the doors without setting off any alarm.

Task: To cut panel with cutting torch: Routine. Dexterity. 2 minutes.

The torch may fail before the panel is opened. If this happens, the PCs may need to physically pry the panel loose. This would be a Strength-based task, with the level of difficulty starting at Impossible and dropping one level for every five minutes of continuous cutting the PCs were able to get out of the cutting torch. After the panel is removed, the door can be opened by hitting the manual release.

Ambush: If the PCs do not think of using the torch to open the panel, or if the autojacks were irreparably damaged in the attempt to make the torch, then the PCs may choose to set an ambush for the eventual return of the guards. Keep in mind that DeSilva's men are experienced space navy personnel who will be expecting some sort of resistance. They will not be easily fooled or caught off guard. And any plan must account for the three-dimensional nature of any engagement, as the locker is in 0G. Using the lockers to hide one or more PCs, or having someone float "above" the door, are possible tactics.

BEAT THE CLOCK

The referee will need to keep a close watch on the passing time and DeSilva's search for the orbital data of the sensor platforms (if the PCs launched their pop-out drone, he will search for the recovery codes as well). If the PCs did not make any attempt to protect the data, or if the bridge was captured before they completed their attempts, then it will take DeSilva a minimum of two hours to break the security codes on the PCs' computer.

Starting at the two-hour mark, the referee should roll 1D10. On a roll of 6+, DeSilva recovers the data. Otherwise, he spends another hour in the attempt.

If the PCs removed the data from the computers, then on DeSilva's success, he will begin to search the PCs' vessel to find some record of the orbital data. If he does not find it at the end of two hours, he will send for one of the PCs to be interrogated while his men continue the search.

When DeSilva's men arrive, the PC closest to the locker room door (or any PC guard posted there) should roll the following task:

Task: To avoid being surprised: Variable. Level of Hearing. Instantaneous.

Referee: If the PC rolling the task has Exceptional hearing, the task is Simple; Excellent hearing is a Routine task; Average hearing is a Difficult task; and Poor hearing is a Formidable task. If the task is successful, the character can give enough warning for the others to conceal any escape efforts.

If the task fails, the character isn't aware of the guards until they begin to open the door. A mishap means the character is unaware of DeSilva's men until after they open the door. In either case, any PCs working on escape efforts must roll the task below.

Task: To hide escape efforts: Variable. Uncertain. Dexterity and Stealth. 2 seconds.

Referee: The difficulty level depends on the success of the task above. If the above task roll was successful, then this task is Routine. If the above task was a Simple failure, then this task is Difficult. If a mishap occurred in the above task, then this task is Formidable.

Once DeSilva's men arrive, unless thwarted by an escape effort, they line up and count their prisoners. They will then call out the name of the PC placed in command of the vessel. (Their information is based on a copy of the patrol vessel's report when the vessel was searched in the Montana system.)

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

If the PCs manage to escape, they will need to make their way through the facility. To remain undetected, roll the following task:

Task: To sneak through the facility undetected: Variable. Stealth. Instantaneous.

Referee: The task difficulty depends on which section of the facility the PCs are in. Specific levels are listed in the section descriptions below.

As the PCs make their way through the facility the referee will need to keep track of DeSilva's men. Of the 35 on-board, two will be in operations manning the computer and communications boards. DeSilva and 10 more will be on-board the PCs' vessel trying to find the orbital data for the sensor platforms. Three will be on DeSilva's catch vessel, one on the bridge and two in engineering, and another three will be in the dock-rock's engineering room. Twelve will be in the warehouse section, ostensibly to provide assistance if needed, but mostly out of curiosity. The remainder will be in the crew section of the facility, attending to personal

chores. If any of DeSilva's men were hurt during the boarding action, they will be in the infirmary section in the crew quarters, and the warehouse group will be reduced accordingly. If DeSilva has sent for the commander of the PCs' expedition, that character will be taken to the PCs' vessel as well.

The pirates will maintain this disposition until DeSilva determines whether the PCs have the orbital data on-board their vessel. If he finds it, he will send the bulk of his men to the catch vessel to prepare it for voyage. He will then wait for his carry ship to arrive and load the PCs' crew on board. If the PCs have removed the orbital data, DeSilva will send an armed guard of four men, each armed with Fusile-7 laser rifles, to retrieve the commander of the vessel for questioning.

Docking/Warehouse: Formidable Stealth task. Designed to allow for expansion, the docking module has a number of docking arms which extend to allow up to 12 vessels to dock at once. Normally, DeSilva keeps the arms fully retracted, extending them only when he is on base. This is the first time since the mine was abandoned that both arms have been extended. DeSilva's vessel is docked to the one nearest the operations center. Most of DeSilva's men will be located here, either assisting their commander or milling about in curiosity. This

area is maintained at 0G.

Operations Center: Difficult Stealth task. Situated next to the docking module, the operations center is the only other section of the facility with an airlock to the outside. From this module, all

phases of the mining facility were monitored. With most of the facility shut down, this module is largely empty, with only the barest of crew needed to man it. This area is maintained at 0G.

Engineering/Power: Routine Stealth task. The largest module of the facility, this section contains the MHD turbines that originally ran the mining complex, along with the backup power cells and maintenance equipment. This module is largely empty.

Life Support: Routine Stealth task. This section contains the atmosphere scrubbing equipment, emergency oxygen supply, food processing, hydroponics, etc. Completely automated, this area is left empty except during routine maintenance.

Smelting and Mineral Extraction: Simple Stealth task. The ore was originally processed here prior to being shipped out. It contains a number of 0G smelters, processing chemicals and other machinery neces-

If the PCs escape, they will need to make their way through the facility.

sary to refine ore into metal. With the mining operations shut down, this module is useless, and while it still maintains a breathable atmosphere, environmental control is minimal. This module is very, very cold.

Crew Quarters: Difficult Stealth task. This is one of two modules designed to be spun for artificial gravity. It contains personal quarters, gym/recreational facilities, food dispenser and infirmary. The large mining crew was housed here during off hours, and DeSilva's men find it very spacious, with each crewmember occupying what was designed as a shared compartment. There are two levels, with a lift down each of three spokes.

Prep Facility: Routine Stealth task. The prep facility is where the miners stored and repaired their gear. It is used by DeSilva's men for excess storage. Designed to spin like the crew quarters, the prep module is currently kept at 0G, but with slightly higher environmental levels than the other unused sections (the temperature level is still well below normal). There are two levels, with large lifts provided. The PCs were originally locked in a locker room on the mining level of this module.

Central Access: Variable Stealth task (difficulty depends on which module the party is next to). This area connects the other sections together. It also contains the flow lines leading from the mining area to the mineral extraction module, the spin gear for the crew and prep facility, and all the power and life-support feeds.

Mining Area: Simple Stealth task. DeSilva's men have never visited the area where the minerals were mined, and it is kept at 0G and zero pressure. An airlock at the end of the prep module will show this reading. It is questionable whether DeSilva knows where to look for the plans to the mining tunnels, although the length of time characters can stay down there is limited to the air supply of their P-suits.

...AND INTO THE FIRE

Ultimately, the PCs should realize that DeSilva's vessel is relatively unprotected and that it is possible to steal DeSilva's own vessel to make their escape.

Only two of the modules on the dock-rock have airlocks leading outside the facility. These are the warehouse/docking module and the operations module. With the majority of DeSilva's men in docking, the best plan for the PCs would be to sneak into operations and overpower the men on duty. If the PCs were successful in sneaking into the

module, they will get a surprise melee attack on the two crewmembers standing watch. If the PCs failed, the referee will need to decide if crewmembers were able to give a warning in time.

A quick search will reveal that the two crewmembers have ID cards hung around their necks. These cards will allow access to

the weapons locker, which contains two Fusile-7 laser rifles, with two charges for each. Each airlock will have two EVA sticks, one set of rocket stakes, a set of magnetic grapplers, guide rope and three minimum-service P-suits known

as "gladbags."

With what they have at hand, the PCs have two means of gaining entry to DeSilva's ship:

Bluff It Out: The PCs could force one of the two subdued crewmembers to gain entrance for them to the pressurized gangway. The danger here is that the crewmember may attempt to give them away. The PCs should roll the following task:

Task: To coerce a crewmember: Difficult, Uncertain. Psychology. 20 seconds.

Referee: If none of the PCs know Spanish, the difficulty is raised by two levels.

Back Door: The PCs could use the equipment they found and attempt to break into DeSilva's ship via a secondary airlock. This involves stringing a guideline from the airlock to the vessel, then opening the secondary airlock via the exterior access panel. Running the guideline is a simple task for anyone with P-suit experience. Breaking into the vessel is more difficult:

Task: To override the airlock mechanism: Formidable, Uncertain. Security Systems or one-half Electronic. 90 seconds.

Referee: Success means the characters have gained access without alerting the crewmember on the bridge.

If the PCs get on-board without alerting DeSilva or his men, it will be a relatively simple matter to overpower the watch crew and hold the ship while the rest of the captured crewmembers make their way to the vessel. If any of DeSilva's men give warning, or if DeSilva discovers that the data is not on-board the PCs' vessel and sends for the PCs to question them, then several minutes of confusion will precede DeSilva's attempt to recapture the PCs. If the PCs have already captured DeSilva's ship, all they need to do is hit the emergency docking release, then make their way from

the dock-rock and back to their home port.

If any of the PCs or their crew have been taken for questioning, DeSilva will hold the individual hostage in an attempt to regain possession of his vessel. The PCs may consider any number of means to secure a release, from taking pot shots at the facility with the armed courier's laser to striking some sort of deal with DeSilva. DeSilva will do whatever it takes to protect the security of his operation, and the well-being of the PCs' crewmate will not stand in his way.

AFTERMATH

When the characters reach Epsilon Eridani (Dukou), an armed detachment of the Manchurian Space Navy will be dispatched. Using the coordinates given them by the PCs, they will find DeSilva's dock-rock, but DeSilva, his men and any trace of their being there will be removed. If the PCs left any members of their party behind in making their escape, they, too, will be missing and presumed to be dead. How the PCs are treated will depend on how they returned to civilization.

If they were set adrift by DeSilva, both the Texas and Manchurian national bureaus will be greatly embarrassed by the event. While both nations will officially state their resolve to end the long reach of the pirate syndicates, a number of political heads will roll, and the PCs could consider themselves lucky if they are not investigated for duplicity in the debacle, nevermind receiving their payment for the assignment.

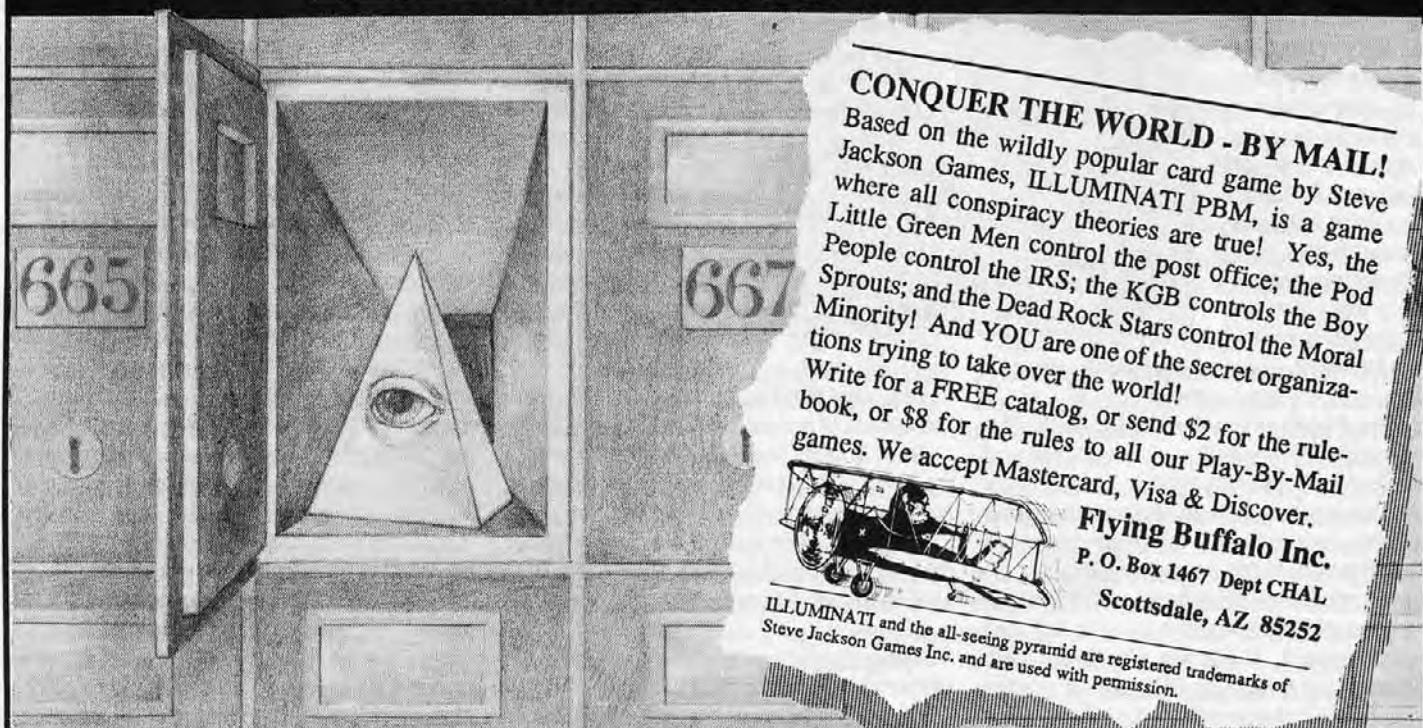
If the PCs escaped, they will have a difficult time operating the larger armed courier with a skeleton crew, but should make it home safely. Their own vessel is unarmed and too badly damaged to be used in pursuit. Any survivors will be treated as heroes. Not only will they receive their promised pay and bonuses, but there will be a dizzying array of offers from the Texas and Manchurian national bureaus, from talk shows and news services exclusives, and from entertainment companies (to buy the rights to their story and/or hire the PCs as consultants). Any of DeSilva's men captured by the PCs will be quickly extradited by the Mexican government via a SAMN black-tapped report for crimes of piracy. (They will later "escape" and "avoid capture.") If the PCs take up the offer presented by the SAMN national bureaus, life will certainly be interesting, as INAP's cover operations division will keep close tabs on them. Ω

For more information on piracy in 2300 AD, refer to "Spacelanes Activity Monitoring Network" (Challenge 56), "Catch & Carry Team" (Challenge 45), and "Piracy: The Sweet Trade in Space" (Challenge 41), all by Erick Melton. *Colonial Atlas*, *Star Cruiser* and *Ships of the French Arm* (published by GDW) are also recommended.



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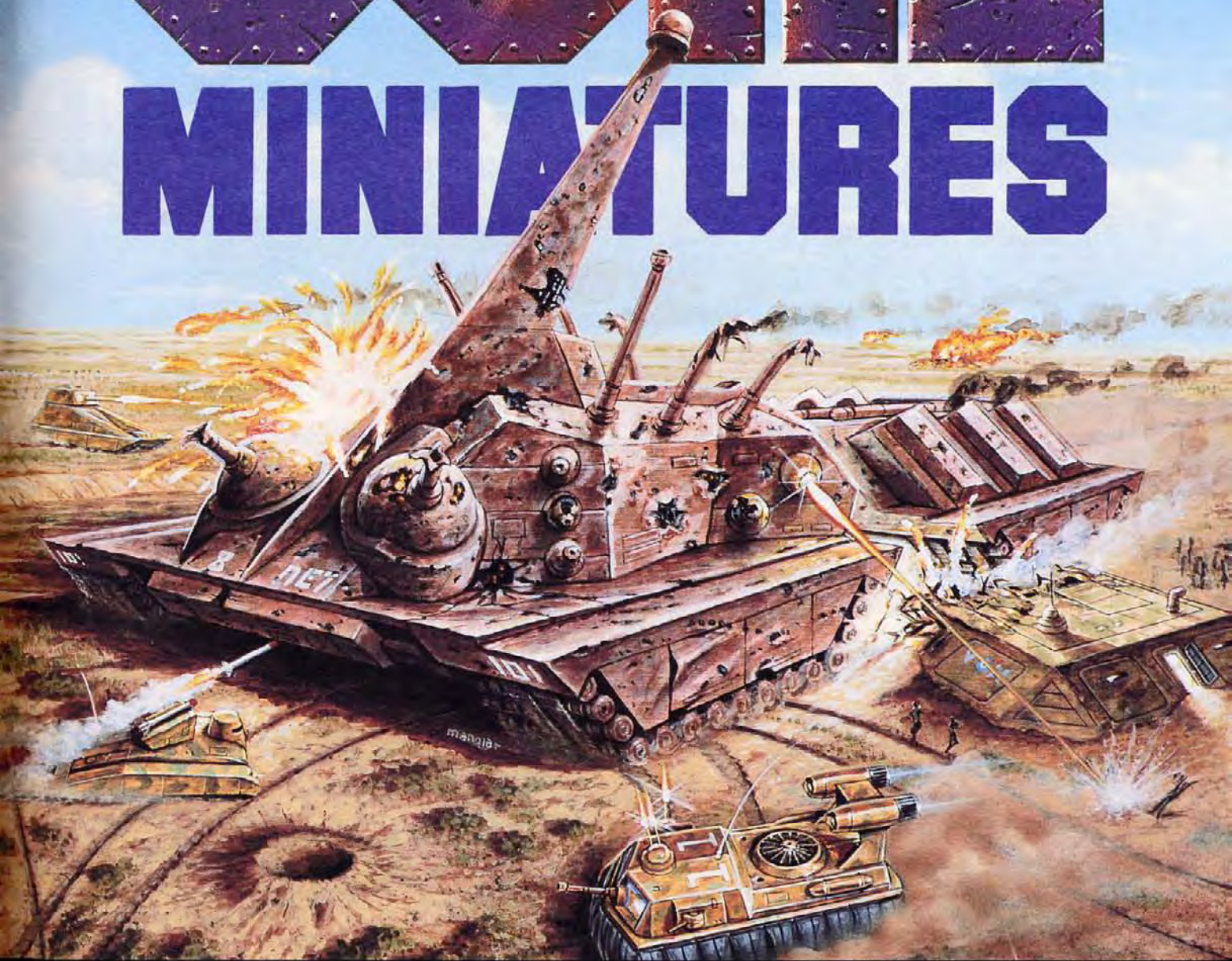
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Shadowrun
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FAIR GAME

By Michael A. Stackpole



It looked like the prayers hadn't helped after all. The mouth of the alley didn't boast much of a crowd. The onlookers had all seen a dead body before. As this one had all its parts and wasn't anyone famous, the gawkers had nothing to stare at. The fact that most of them were allergic to the strobing blue lights on top of the LoneStar cruiser knifed across the sidewalk and shining its headlights on the manmeat also helped thin the rabble. No one lingered in my way as I crossed the curb, squeezed by the cruiser and into the alley.

The Ork cop looked up at me, raindrops streaking white in the headlights' glare. "Know him, Kies?" Harry Braxen blinked and narrowed his eyes against the warm rain. "Take a good look."

I didn't need more than a second. His pink eyes staring up at the gray Seattle sky, the albino looked more like a wax statue than he did the remains of a human being. His white hair had been cut into a mohawk, and the rain failed to wash the glued spikes down. His lips had never been that colorful, but their unhealthy blue blended nicely with the grayish pallor of his skin and the mists coming in off the Sound.

"You knew him too, Braxen. You saw him in the Barrens the day Rev. Roberts did the martyr dance." The same day I told a little boy to say his prayers so the albino would be okay. "His name was Albion. I don't think he had a SIN."

Braxen made a note in a small notebook. "Any guess why he got it?"

"Why?" I shook my head and unconsciously touched the silver wolf's-head pendant at my throat. "Not a clue."

"Determining how he got it is simple," offered my shadow. Inching forward to squat down on birdlike titanium legs, Kid Stealth pulled aside the wet newspaper pages covering Albion's windward flank. He revealed a hole in the side of Albion's washed-out Mercurial T-shirt. Despite Braxen's weak protest, Stealth used his metal left hand to rip the T-shirt open, and he pointed out the bluish hole in Albion's chest. "Entry wound, .30-06 with a light bullet and light charge. Stressed copper jacket, I would assume, designed to fragment on impact."

Stealth cranked his head around to look at the Ork. "Most of the kid's blood will be in this lung. He got hit, started bleeding and ran himself to death."

Braxen nodded but made no notes. He and I both knew that if Stealth—one of the world's experts on innovative means of rival-retirement—pointed it out and it concerned death, he wouldn't be wrong. "What kind of gun?"

Stealth's foot claws grated slightly on the cement alley floor as he straightened up again. "Customized rifle. Long barrel to maximize accuracy and muzzle velocity. Good work."

The cruiser's headlights made Braxen's tusks stand out against his swarthy flesh. "You do the work?"

"I'm not a toymaker."

"Wasn't a toy that killed this boy, Stealth."

Stealth shrugged as if to say "have it your own way." He jammed his hands into the pockets of his London Fog trenchcoat and sat back on his haunches. The headlights left him a silhouette except for the reddish light burning in his Zeiss eyes.

I knew from the set of Stealth's shoulders that he wouldn't be saying anything more to Braxen. "Harry, your forensics people can verify what Stealth has said."

The grunge cop shook his head. "No they won't. No autopsy for this one."

"What are you talking about? It's a suspicious death, isn't it?" I glanced down at Albion's body. "You need an autopsy to help in your investigation."

"What investigation, Kies? This guy doesn't have a SIN. He doesn't exist, as far as the system is concerned. He isn't even a statistic."

I wanted to grab him, but two things stopped me. The first was the

realization that he was absolutely correct. Without a System Identification Number, Albion and all the other denizens of the city who lurked in the shadows did not exist. Schools wouldn't take them; hospitals wouldn't treat them; help centers ignore them.

I know, for I grew up without a SIN myself.

There was no way the system was going to investigate the death of a person without roots in the community. Had Albion been an Elf or Ork or Indian, other folks might have taken an interest in him. LoneStar, though, was a private organization hired to keep the peace in Seattle, not to clean up after some murderer who got careless when dropping his trash.

The second thing that stopped me was Braxen's tone of voice. For all his being a cop, Harry Braxen wasn't like most of the others. He'd grown up in Seattle and, as an Ork, had known discrimination and the callous side of the system. He'd known who Albion was the second he'd seen him, but he'd called me down to identify the body, to get me interested in what happened to him.

"Spill it, Harry. I don't like standing in the rain."

Braxen squatted down beside the body, and I dropped to my haunches beside him. Kid Stealth's shadow hid both of us, and Harry kept his voice low enough so that only Albion and the Murder Machine could hear us. "Could be this is the fourth body I've seen dropped like this. Two Gillettes down by the docks and one dreamqueen up in Belmont. She was the first, and we got some datafiles on her before they lost her body. Files were dumped."

"She have a name?"

"Athena Neon is what I filed her under. She had the tattoo of a neon rose on her butt, and that name was printed on the yellow ribbon wound round the stem."

I nodded slowly. "It went down the same way?"

"Identical, except for maybe one detail." Braxen reached out and turned Albion's face to the left and then to the right. "Can't tell with him, but the other three lost a lock of hair. Coroner said that on Neon, and one of the Gillettes was a guy I'd popped the month before. I noticed it on him—a dreadlock was missing."

In the back of my mind the Old One—what I call the slice of the great Wolf Spirit lairing in my psyche—started to growl. I felt the hairs on the back of my neck prick up. "No other links?"

Braxen shrugged. "You know that sometimes us cops keep 'hobby cases.'"

"You work on them in your spare time?" I smiled. "I have a list of women like that."

"Sure. Well, these killings were a hobby case of mine, but my files are gone, just flat gone. Someone with mondo-juice hit my corner of the Matrix and wiped them out."

I straightened up. "You're going to call a meat wagon for him?"

"Unless you think Salacia and her people want to make arrangements for him." Braxen looked down at the kid as a wind-whipped plastic bag molded itself to Albion's face. "The kid should have stayed where he would've been safe."

"Amen," I said to that, knowing that to find out what happened to Albion, I'd be going places that weren't even in hailing distance of safe.

II

Stealth and I retreated deeper into the alley as the morgue van arrived. The attendants zipped Albion into a bodybag glistening with rain. Harry supervised and handed the driver a card. They parted cordially, and Harry followed the van, taking his headlights with him and leaving us in the dark.

I turned to Kid Stealth. "He's gone. Give me what you've got because I know you're dying to have me show him up."

Stealth answered me in a flat monotone. "Raven will be back from Tokyo tomorrow night. I will tell him. He can decide what will be done about this."

"Stealth, let me do some legwork first. You can lay it out for Raven when Doc gets back to the house." I pointed to the place where the rain had begun to darken the lighter outline of Albion's body. "The trail will get cold."

"No. He'll be back." The red lights in Stealth's eyes bloated and shrank. "He's a thrill killer."

"What?"

"This is his recreation." Stealth looked at me for a moment, looked away, then nodded. "The bullets you use in your Beretta Viper..."

"Silver, drilled and patched with a silver nitrate solution to make them explosive."

"Why?"

I hesitated. Kid Stealth hadn't been around during the Full Moon Slashings, so he didn't know about what Raven and I had run into during them. I'd developed the bullets to deal with that mess, and I'd kept using them in case I'd not been as complete as I wanted to imagine I had been. I sensed in his question, however, not a desire to know the history of my bullets as much as the thinking that had gone into producing them.

"I had them done that way so they would maximize shock and destruction. Bullets are meant to kill, and I wanted mine to do the job well."

"The bullet used on Albion was designed to make him die. Back before the Awakening, before magick came back to the world, there were people who would test their hunting skills by using a bow and arrows to take wildlife." Stealth held his hands before him as if visualizing what he started to describe. "Bows are uncertain. Because an arrow might not cause enough damage, innovative arrowhead designs were created. One type had three or four razored edges that spiraled around the arrowhead like the edges on a drill-bit. It was called a bleeder and was designed to chew up as much of the animal's insides as it could, while leaving a blood trail for the hunter to follow."

The Old One howled angrily in the back of my mind. "Stealth, you mentioned a stressed copper jacket with a light bullet and light charge. You're saying Albion was shot with the ballistic equivalent of a bleeder?"

"His wound was non-midline."

I frowned. "It still killed him."

"No. The rifle used was more than capable of putting the shot through an eye at a range of at least 250 meters. Albion was wounded by design."

"What killed him, then?"

"He drowned in his own blood. He was coursed to death."

"Coursed?"

Stealth nodded, and—wonder of wonders—for once the Old One agreed with him. Unbidden, the Wolf Spirit lent me his heightened sense. The night vision made everything much clearer in the alley, but that wasn't the sense the Old One wanted me to use. My nostrils twitched, and, amid the noxious odors of rotting garbage and thrice-scorching radiator fluid, I caught a very sharp scent.

The Old One forced me to savor it. A large canine, Longtooth. It was here and marked the territory of its kill. It did as its master commanded. It is much like the Murder Machine to which you speak.

"A cyberpup ran Albion down?"

Stealth nodded. "Foot spurs scraped the wall over there when it lifted its leg to mark its hunting ground."

"Custom rifle, custom dog. This guy has some serious long nuyen to be dropping on his pastime." I shook my head. "If what Braxen said is accurate, he's dusted four. Not likely to stop—as you said, a thrill killer."

"A dilettante." Stealth looked hard at me. "You will pursue this before Raven returns?"

A lingering sense of guilt concerning Albion slowly stole over my mind. He had been angry when I last saw him, and he'd stalked off into the night alone. That had been months ago, but part of me saw

his death as my fault. I knew, realistically, that was nonsense, but I couldn't shake the feeling.

"I knew him. It's personal."

Stealth extended his left hand, the metal one, toward me. "Give me ¥10 cab fare."

"I'll drop you at Raven's before I head out."

"Give me ¥10."

I dug my hand into my pocket. If Guinness could check it out, Kid Stealth would make its OpDat disk of World Records in 10 different categories—all of them lumped under the Homicide heading. I peeled a ¥10 note off the slender roll I had in my jeans and handed it to him.

"I want to see a receipt and my change back," I added. He might have had more unsolved murders to his credit than Isaac Asimov had novels, but if I didn't give him a hard time, he'd be insufferable.

Stealth took the bill and disappeared it into a pocket. "Wolf, this one plays at death."

I nodded. That was about as close as Stealth would ever get to telling me to be careful. He ascribes a lot to the "a word to the wise is sufficient" school of caring for other folks. Given that the last time he tried to show concern over my fate he shot me in the back, the verbal message did seem more friendly. "I will keep you posted on my actions. I promise."

Without so much as a nod of acknowledgement, Stealth turned and withdrew into the alleyway. I didn't turn to watch him because the Old One tries to make me laugh at Stealth's cyber-bunny hopping gait. In terms of lethality, doing that strongly resembles sucking on 20 packs of nikostix a day for longer than I've been alive. The other reason I didn't watch him is that Stealth was likely to cut up and over to Seventh by using those miracle claws of his to scale the building, and getting my knuckles bloody as the Old One tries to prove he can let me do that too is really annoying.

The Old One's sensory gifts did come in helpful as I turned them back toward the street. As I walked out in the general direction of where I'd left the Fenris parked in another alley, I heard someone sobbing. Tears aren't all that uncommon in the Sprawl, and more than one Samaritan has been lured into a headache by thinking he was rescuing a woman in distress. In this case, however, the sob wasn't coming from a voxsynth chip, but from the throat of a little girl slumped against the alley wall.

The rain had soaked her hair and made it clump into stringy tendrils about as skinny as her arms and legs. She wore a clear plastic raincoat that ended somewhere between her neon green hotpants and her argyle kneesocks. Her blouse matched the shorts in color and ended just below her breasts to show off a flat stomach. It also showed off her ribs. As she looked up at me with hollow, red-rimmed eyes, I wondered if she was an anorexia poster-child.

I gave her a smile I hoped wouldn't threaten her. "How long had you known Albion?"

She blinked as I said his name. "You knew him?"

I nodded. Looking up the street, I spotted a corner diner I'd eaten at before without dying. "C'mon, let's get out of the rain." I reached for her arm, but she retreated away from me.

"No way, chummer. I may be griefer, but I'm not a flatliner."

I held my hands up and kept them open. "Okay, bad start. My name is Wolfgang Kies. I knew Albion, and I'm going to find out what happened to him. If you want to help, it'll make my job easier."

She watched me warily, then nodded. "Kay. Albie mentioned you. I'm Cutty."

I pointed to the diner, and she nodded. "How long you and Albion been together, Cutty?"

She cut across the street like a zombi hungering for a bumper-kiss. She never noticed the squealing brakes, nor did she acknowledge the curses shouted at her. I let the Old One growl at anyone who vented his wrath on me, and that generally calmed things. Once across Blanchard, Cutty headed into the diner and dropped into a

booth like a rag doll suddenly stuffed with lead shot.

The waitress frowned at her, but I gave her one of my "this could be your lucky day, darling" smiles and she relented. "Soykaf for me. Milk and some soup or something for her, okay?" The waitress snapped her gum, then turned and snapped our order to the Ork working the kitchen.

"Third time is the charm. Cutty, how long had you been playing house with Albion?"

Her head came up, and I saw a spark of life in her brown eyes. "A month, I guess." She blinked twice, then frowned. "This is October, right?"

"November, but who's counting?"

"Oh, two months, then."

"Gotcha." I'd last seen Albion on a very warm July night, which put him with her within six weeks of his having left his friends in the Barrens. "He was cool during that time? No problems?"

Cutty nodded. "Like ice. Did some boosting, you know? His thing was fixing stuff, though, and he used to patch decks together before folks would fence them. Made him sort of legit, you know? Then folks started recommending him, and he fixed lots of stuff."

"I get the picture." And the picture I got was a dismal one. I had been hoping Albion would have gotten himself in solid with a group or gang or place that would narrow my area of inquiry. If I had to track ever cracked or heisted deck he laid screwdriver to, I'd be looking for his killer long after Kid Stealth rusted away to nothing.

The waitress arrived with our food, and Cutty stared at the New England clam chowder with the same look of horror you'd expect if the waitress had regurgitated it right there at the table. She looked at the milk as if the waitress was Lucretia Borgia. I compensated for this by regarding the steaming cup of soykaf like the Holy Grail and looking at the waitress as if she was the Madonna. Clearly the waitress thought of herself as a different sort of Madonna, and thinking about it, I realized the kind of music we could have made together would have beat Gregorian chanting by an ecclesiastical mile.

"Drink, eat. You need the milk to strengthen your bones, and the soup will put some meat on them." I appropriated a dollop of her milk for my soykaf, which suddenly made her possessive about the food. I feigned offense, which seemed to please her somehow and made her eat. "Albion didn't have any steady killtime, did he? Anything that would have made him a candidate for a toxic lead dump?"

She nodded her head as a droplet of chowder rolled down over her pointed chin. "Just started a caper at the Pacific NorthWest Huntsman's Club. Got it through a person he did some fixing for. Steady work that didn't cut into his side biz. Didn't need a SIN for it."

That last bit would draw Albion like a flame draws a moth. Albion fiercely defended his independence and wanted nothing to do with the system. Like all those who scurry in the shadows, he dreamed of being as big as Mercurial some day, but the chances of that were slimmer than Cutty here. What he didn't know, what few of us without SINs did know, is that it's easier for society to destroy you than it is for them to even notice you.

"That's a place to start. Do you remember who gave him the job?"

Her wet hair flew back and forth as she shook her head. At least I think she shook her head, but I couldn't see any of her face around the edges of the bowl as she tipped it up to drain it. The bowl came back down, and a plastic sleeve came away from her face smeared with the last of the chowder. "Don't remember." She looked over toward the counter and licked her lips as she eyed a stack of frosted donuts.

I'd seen bricks with a longer attention span than she had, but I put it down to her being in shock. Our waitress returned and brought with her the donut tray. Cutty selected two big chocolate frosted fat-pills. I passed, so Cutty took a third in case I reconsidered. I handed the waitress a ¥20 to cover the bill and tip, and I saw Cutty watch the money vanish almost as hungrily as she'd looked the donuts.

"With Albion gone, what are you doing for money?"

She smiled at me, her eyes growing vacant. "For ¥50 I'll do anything you like."

"Yeah?"

She nodded solemnly. "Anything."

"You got it." I pulled out my quickly dwindling cash supply and laid down two twenties and a ten. "You said anything, right?"

Cutty licked at the frosting in a way she hoped was suggestively erotic. "You pay, piper, and you call the dance."

"Good." Had I a necrophile's taste for skeletal women, I suppose I might have come up with something truly inventive for her to earn my money. As it was, I had a more sinister plan in mind. "For this ¥50 you're going to sit here and wait for an Elven woman named Salacia to come see you. She was a friend of Albion's before you knew him—just friends, not lovers. Tell her about him." I got up from the booth. "Stay with her and the rest of Albion's family, and let them know what happened to him."

Cutty looked up at me and shook her head. "Albion always said you were a weird dude, but one he could trust. He didn't trust many."

"You'll wait?"

She nodded. "You'll find me there, with Salacia, and you can tell me how Albion's story ends."

I left her in the diner and made my way back to the Fenris. Though he's not much on technology, even the Old One likes the Fenris. Slow and sleek, angles except where the flat black body curves neatly around a wheelwell or back around a bumper, the car looks like a wedge that's sharp enough to split the sky from the planet at the horizon.

Before I rounded the corner of the alley, I pulled out the anti-theft system remote control. Because this section of town hadn't been that bad, I'd only hit the "one chirp" button to set the defenses on "stun." As the car came into view, I hit the control and got a single chirp back in response as I deactivated the security system. From behind the car, two startled kids jumped up and started running down the alley.

Their laughter made me believe they'd been up to mischief and little more, but caution made me check the back of the Fenris. Two big old rats, the fat kind that feast in dumpsters, lay twitching on the ground. The kids had been amusing themselves by catching the rats and tossing them against the Fenris' body. The resulting shock left the rats half-dead, but served as a practical lesson to warn the kids off messing with my ride.

The Fenris whisked me through the Seattle streets. The radar-bane coating Doctor Raven had sprayed over the car's surface made the Fenris reflect less light than the rain-slicked street. I cruised around, checking for folks following me. When I saw it was clear, I made for Raven's place and used the car phone to call Salacia.

Another of the kids who lived at the house answered the phone. Sine said she'd get word to Salacia and they'd pick Cutty up quickly. "And, Sine, look, Albion didn't make it. The girl's in shock. Maybe you can do for her what none of us could do for Albion."

She agreed, and I hung up as I slid the Fenris into Raven's underground parking garage. The automatic door shut behind me and locked tightly. Getting out of the Fenris, I locked it and gave it two chirps, setting it on "mangle." Anyone stupid enough to break into Raven's place deserved all the surprises he could handle.

I went from the garage straight into the basement computer room. The incredibly sanitary white of the walls and tiles is a shocker at the best of times, but it seemed almost dreamlike after the rainy Seattle evening. The same could be said of the room's sole occupant after an evening spent with Braxen and Kid Stealth.

Valerie Valkyrie covered a yawn with a slender-fingered hand. She still looked radiant from having met Jimmy Mackelroy, the *enfant terrible* of the Seattle Seadogs. Actually, I think the radiance

came from helping him through the trauma of Seattle's loss in the series, which beat the hell out of how she moped last year until spring training. Though she'd lost her heart to him, she still had a smile for me, and I returned one with interest.

"Good morning, Ms. Valkyrie. Are you up early or up late?"

Heavy lids half-hid blue eyes. "After 36 hours, that sort of question hardly matters." She glanced back at the deck and the jack that usually fit snugly in the slot behind her left ear. "Another marathon Dementia-Gate session. I could have gone longer, but Lynn said she wanted to leave the game so she can rest up for your date tomorrow night. You getting serious on her, Mr. Kies?"

"That date's tonight, Val, after the sun comes up." If it weren't for Valerie's *cafe-au-lait* complexion coming to her through genetics, she'd have looked as pale as Albion. "You have seen the sun this month, haven't you?"

"Nice dodge, Wolf." She smiled and killed another yawn. "You here from the Committee for the Production of Vitamin D, or have you a job that is beyond your meager computer talents?"

"Meager?" I frowned as I pulled off my black leather jacket and tossed it onto one of the white leather chairs back in the corner. "I know how to turn one of these things on and off, you know. Meager, sheesh."

She gave me an exaggerated nod. "Sure you do. What do you need?"

"The Pacific Northwest Huntsman's Club lost an employee tonight. You pulled a file on him back when we went after Rev. Roberts. You remember Albion?"

"His file was a null. Burkingmen had some anecdotes about him. He was working at PNHC?"

"So I understand. A member recommended him. I want to know who he was and something about him."

"Is that all?" Valerie rolled her eyes. "Look, Wolf, no jack."

I stuck my tongue out at her, but she'd turned back and started beating out a harsh staccato on her keyboard. I left the room and mounted the stairs to the first floor. In the kitchen I grabbed two cups of coffee and exchanged a series of uninformative grunts with Tom Electric. He had his eyes glued to a Bookman and was doing his best to upload some self-help book into his gray-ROM.

"Annie's coming back to town, eh, Tom?"

Grunt and nod.

I looked at the container the chip-book had come in. "*All I Need to Know to Understand Women I Learned In Catholic School?* Are you sure that will help you, Tom?"

Hopeful grunt and emphatic nod.

I shrugged and carried the dual mugs of soykaf from the room. Tom's ex-wife comes to SeaTac ever six months or so, whether Tom's recovered from the last visit or not. I wondered at Tom's choice of scanning material because Annie struck me as about the most un-nunlike woman I'd ever met. Then again, I couldn't rule out the possibility that she'd found a convent out there that catered to macro-biotically nourished, politically correct, archeo-feminist, neo-retro splatter-metal enthusiasts with bipolar disorders.

Valerie silently forgave me for taking so long when I handed her the brimming mug. "Got your prey."

"It was that easy?"

"No, love, I'm that good." She shook her head, her thick brown braid flopping from shoulder to shoulder. "What does Lynn see in you?"

"She knows, deep down, I'm just a real sensitive guy." I gave her a crocodile smile, then leaned against a mainframe cabinet. "Who is he?"

"She. Selene Reece is her name. She's a great granddaughter of Harold Reece. He was a newspaper tycoon before the Awakening. He diversified and left everyone a lot of money. She's a black sheep of the family, the illegitimate daughter of a granddaughter who used a lot of recreational chemicals at a time when it was thought LSD

could keep one from Goblinizing."

I nodded. Orks and Trolls usually breed true, but some folks in the general population are tagged with "monster" genes. They tend to kick in around puberty, causing embarrassment somewhat greater than having your voice crack or your face break out. In essence, their whole body breaks out, and they shift from being normal human kids to Orks or even worse.

It's not pretty and most often is very confusing. There are plenty of Orks who don't make it through the transformation with their psyches intact. There are even more con artists making a fortune selling everything from sugar pills to votive candles to prevent kids from undergoing the change. While kids might not fully understand the problem, their parents do and will do just about anything to avoid the humiliation of having a child "run away."

"This Reece recommended Albion to the club as a hire? I have a hard time placing Albion and his porcupine coiffure in that kind of place."

Val shrugged and sipped soykaf. "Cheap thrills for the elite without their having to go slumming. The club's computer didn't have any record of his employment, but the tailor who made his uniform still had a copy of the employment record. She's listed as his sponsor."

"Checks with what Cutty told me. Where is Reece now?"

"You're expecting a lot in exchange for a kafcup. Tom Electric would have brought me donuts."

"I owe you. Do you know where she is?"

Valerie nodded her head. "According to the club schedule, she's up in the Yukon. She won a lottery and is going after a snow moose. Won't be back for a week."

I smiled widely enough that Valerie knew I was getting myself into trouble and wanted her to set it up. "Can you crack back into their computer to confirm a dinner engagement for me with her there, tonight, about 6? Make it look like it was on, then got scrubbed by the lottery win."

She looked hard at me. "You're seeing Lynn tonight, Wolf."

"I know, I know." I set the mug on top of the computer. "Set the dinner thing for 6. I meet Lynn at 8. I just want a chance to look around. I'll be in and out fast. I want to reconnoiter so I can report to Doc when he gets back."

Valerie drew in a deep breath, then let it out slowly. "I suppose, but if you stand Lynn up, you'll regret it."

"I wouldn't dream of it, Val. Honest."

"Good," she smiled contentedly, "because if you do, I'll make sure you're on every boiler-room investment house *hot* list from now until the collapse of Western civilization."

III

This is the part of the story where most narrators mention that they slept fitfully and had prophetic dreams about the past and future melding together. I'm supposed to tell you all about the dreams, using cryptic terms that will confuse you until things come together later. It's the way you know the stuff you're reading is *art*.

I've got no dreams to share. That doesn't mean I didn't dream, mind you, but just that I don't want to share the dreams. From the second my head hit the pillow in the spare room Raven has allotted to me, I dreamed of Lynn. The dreams might have been prophetic—in fact, I was hoping they were—which explains why I'm not going to share them.

I fully intended to sleep until the sun was so far over the yardarm that they'd have to use a satellite link to communicate, but Stealth whooshed and creaked on into the room I use. My eyes came instantly open, but my Beretta remained beneath the pillow. No sense in wasting a bullet on a target that could have taken an Exocet hit without denting his hide.

"No new toys to show me?" I sat up in the bed and let the frivolity drain out of my voice. His armor is better against humor than it is

against bullets. "What's up, Stealth?"

"Valerie Valkyrie says you are concerned with the Pacific Northwest Huntsman's Club."

I nodded. "Albion had a job there for the past week. He was recommended by a member. I thought I would check it out this evening."

Stealth remained absolutely still for a moment. He didn't so much as breathe, which he really didn't need to do anyway. To help in the assassination work he used to do before he became claw-abled, Stealth traded a lung lobe for a slow-release oxygen system. Saved his life once—it gave him the time to free his feet from a block of cement at the bottom of the Sound.

At last the oracle spoke. "You will be armed?"

Stealth lives by that fragment of wisdom that says, "No problem so large that it cannot be solved by the suitable application of plastic explosives." He proved it, both in his professional and private life. In fact, to get out of the cement block, he blew the lower parts of his legs off. This is why, when we do have casual conversations, I don't tell him about hangnails or hernias.

"Actually, I expected this to be a soft recon. I have to meet Lynn later."

"Ms. Ingold."

"That's the one. She doesn't much like guns—she's still hinky about the grunges who grabbed her, so I thought I would travel light."

"I see." He froze for another second, then turned and started out of the room.

"Hey, Stealth, wait!"

He slowed and looked back over his shoulder at me.

"My change from the cab?"

His Zeiss eyes blinked at me once, then he turned and left.

Stealth's silent departure didn't bother me as much as it might have someone else. He's weird enough that if having him owe me money meant he would try to avoid me, I could live with that. Then again, for all I knew, he had gone off trying to figure how to give me change in bullets of differing calibers.

The Old One gave a yip as I looked in a mirror at the results of a shower, shave and the suitable application of sartorial accoutrements. I appreciated the sentiment, but I waited for Valerie's opinion before I felt comfortable with what I had chosen. Not that I was that comfortable in the clothes—neckties and nooses have more in common than both starting with the letter N.

Valerie gave me a full 1000-watt smile. "Oh, Wolf, if I had an icebreaker as sharp as you, I'd be in the Aztechnology database and gone running at just three mhz. Double-breasted blazer of blue, good choice, gray slacks, dark socks, white shirt, TAB tie, nice, and wing-tip shoes." She gave me the hairy-eyeball. "You fixing to make this date real special?"

I winked at her. "Val, every date with me is special. And the answer is no, I'm not handing her some gold-bound ice. We're having dinner with her great aunt from St. Louis." I wanted to toss another wisecrack out at her, but the well was dry. Thinking about Lynn and me and the future required so much brainpower that I didn't have enough idle cells to be coming up with smart remarks.

Val gave me a hug and told me to transfer it to Lynn, noting, "You're on your own after that, jack." I gave her a peck on the cheek and specifically told her *not* to pass that to Jimmy Mackelroy from me, then headed out into the garage. I disarmed the Fenris from outside its effective range and sent it roaring out into the Seattle night.

The rain had vanished, and the night looked to be clear and a tad crisp. I found the Pacific Northwest Huntsman's Club on the first try and parked down the block. Two chirps from the remote left it on "with extreme prejudice," which would be more than enough to keep the local footsponges from mistaking it for a bar, bathroom or king-size bed.

I managed to wrestle the double-breasted jacket's internal button into its hole by the time I reached the awning extending out over the sidewalk. A doorman waited at the top of the stone steps and opened the door for me without comment. Up another flight of steps and a left turn brought me to the club's foyer, where a large man greeted me with a smile. "Yes, sir?"

"Evening. I'm Wynn Archer. I'm supposed to be dining with Selene Reece." I nervously glanced at my watch. "I'm early."

Dark clouds of confusion spread over the man's face. "Ms. Reece has no dinner reservation tonight, sir. Perhaps you are confused as to the evening?"

I shook my head and let my smile tell him I knew I was right. "Wednesday the 27th. I've been looking forward to this for two weeks."

He held up a hand. "Just a moment." He disappeared behind a curtain, and I heard the clicker-clack of a keyboard. I knew Valerie had managed to mess up his records when the sound of key pounding got louder.

He returned with a smile on his face. "There has been a mistake, sir. Ms. Reece apparently did have reservations, but they were canceled when she went out of town on an urgent trip."

"Are you sure? Perhaps I should wait in the lounge until we see if she makes it. You know as well as I that she would have canceled with me if she didn't expect to be here."

The host started to tell me the lounge was only for members, but I stuck him on the horns of a dilemma. If he did that and gave me the bum's rush, he could end up embarrassing a member because *her* plans didn't happen to include informing him of what she was going to do. He took a look at me and must have decided I looked harmless.

"Please, sir, we would be happy if you would wait in the lounge. You do understand, of course, that it is for members only, so..."

I nodded. "I shall wait at the bar and not bother anyone."

His smile told me we had an understanding, and I wandered into the bar. Dark and subdued, it featured dark wood panels and rich leather upholstery. Given the identities of the few local celebs I recognized, I figured the club had to charge enough in dues that the decorations were probably realthetic. Even the peanuts in the bowl at the bar looked like dirtfruit instead of vat-droppings.

I ordered the house brew and found that a mug of it set me back more than Stealth's cab ride. It tasted pretty good, but not *that* good. I consoled myself by looking at what the others were drinking and guessing at the number of digits in their bar tabs.

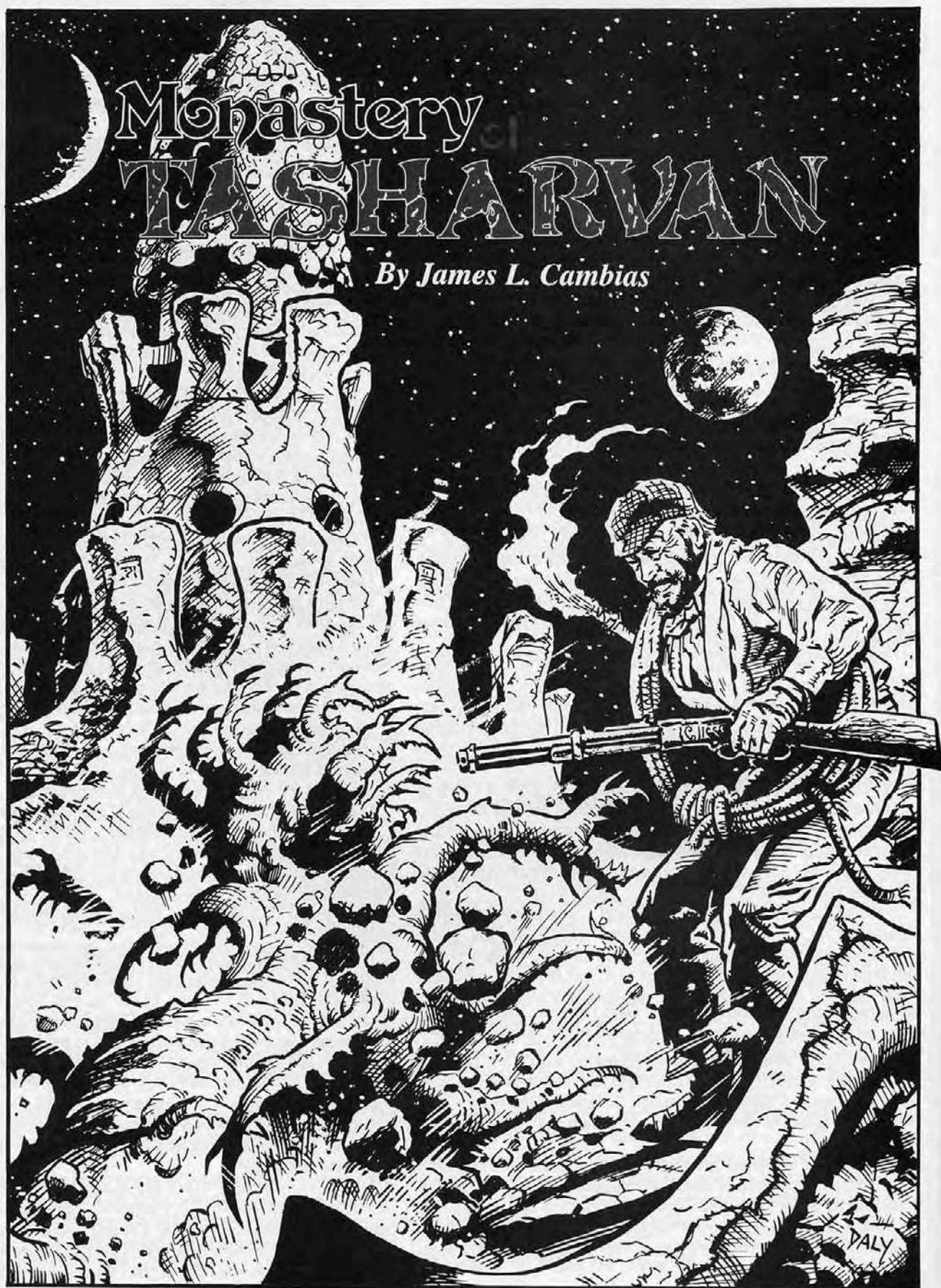
I ordered a refill from the bartender and tried to begin a conversation with him, but he sped off to deal with other patrons—the ones who looked like big tippers or those who were there with someone else's spouse. Before he could return to the styx where I was sitting, someone tapped me on the shoulder.

"Mr. Archer? I understand we're having dinner together this evening?"

I turned around and found myself looking up at a woman who surprised me in many ways. Had I been standing, she would have come within an inch of being as tall as me. Powerful shoulders tapered down to a slender waist and shapely legs that indicated a serious interest in athletics as opposed to milder "shaping" workouts. Her face showed signs of an arctic tan, and the makeup she used carefully blended away the white flesh around her brown eyes. Her black hair, which had been cut boyishly short, hid her ears and aptly bordered a sharply angular face. A pert nose and full lips made her beautiful by anyone's definition, but the fire in her eyes made her *challenging*.

I offered her my hand. "Pleased to meet you, Ms. Reece." I figured I could go one of two ways at this point—either make her think we both had been deceived, or play it straight. As she took my hand in a firm, dry grip, I decided honesty was the best policy. "I am not Wynn Archer. Please, join me. I can explain the reason for my deception."

(continued on page 80)



Monastery TASHARVAN

By James L. Cambias



When I returned to my rooms from the Explorer's Club, I told my Martian batman to pack my bags for a trip. "We're going to explore an old monastery up north. Tasharvan, it's called. Why, what's wrong, Thaneet?"

His face had taken on an expression of profound sadness. "Alas, I must seek another master. For if you go to that place, you will certainly die!"

Professor Charles Dyer approaches the PCs in Syrtis Major. He is organizing an expedition to explore the abandoned monastery of Tasharvan, which lies between Dioscuria and Cydonia. Dyer has heard that the characters are experienced explorers, and would like them to come along. The university will provide a stipend of £1 per diem and will cover all expenses.

According to chronicles in the old Imperial Library at Syrtis Major, Tasharvan was the headquarters of a sect devoted to preserving the scientific knowledge of the ancient Martians. The order flourished for centuries, surviving even after the Dioscuria-Cydonia Canal dried up, leaving its headquarters in the middle of a desert. The Seldon emperors and other princes supported the order in exchange for technical assistance and advice. About 2000 years ago, the monastery was abandoned. All the scholars at Tasharvan disappeared, and parties visiting it failed to return. Caravans following the old canal bed began avoiding the place, and stories circulated telling of ghosts and monsters. If even half the old chronicles are true, the monastery could hold scientific secrets of incalculable value.

EXPEDITION

Professor Dyer, a noted archaeologist, leads the Cambridge University expedition to the monastery of Tasharvan. Dyer is no mere treasure-hunter. He plans to survey the monastery systematically, photographing each room, cataloguing each item and proceeding downward from the top, floor by floor. The group consists of Dyer, the PCs and several Martian workers. Big Jack Slade, a big-game hunter and explorer, has been hired as a guide. The expedition will travel aboard a small steam flyer donated by the Royal Martian Geographic Society.

The expedition is equipped with a full assortment of camping gear, enough canned food for two months, surveying apparatus, digging tools, four cameras and hundreds of photographic plates. Because of the danger from High Martians and desert nomads, the expedition has two Lee-Enfield rifles, two Winchester lever-action rifles, a Holland & Holland heavy double rifle and two 12-gauge shotguns. The flyer has a five-barrel Nordenfiet machinegun. The PCs may bring their own personal weapons.

From Syrtis Major, the little ship heads north along the canals to Coloe, then west to Dioscuria, where the flyer refuels, and takes on extra supplies and water. Encounters and adventures en route may be added at the referee's discretion.

TASHARVAN

The monastery of Tasharvan stands along the dead canal bed between Ismenilus and Cydon (400 miles west of Ismenilus). The region is an arid steppe, the border between the polar tundra and the vast deserts to the south.

The monastery is a looming complex, heavily fortified, carved from a granite outcrop overlooking the canal. The facility has suffered from the ravages of time. Many of the structures on top of the rock have collapsed. The main entrance at ground level is blocked by a mass of rubble from a fallen tower, so the only way in is from the top.

Entry Level

The buildings atop the monastery complex have suffered from 2000 years of exposure to the elements. What scavengers have not stolen, the wind has reduced to dust. All the rooms are empty.

Courtyard: The flyer is moored in the large open area.

Camp: Dyer will make camp atop the monastery, sheltered in one of the time-worn buildings just off the courtyard. The location affords protection from desert animals and nomads, so posting watches at night is unnecessary.

Auditorium: This large, domed building is an auditorium or temple, with fascinating and beautiful murals portraying allegorical figures or gods representing the Martian arts and sciences. Dyer sets up his working materials in this room, photographing, cataloging and packing up items for transport.

Lower Levels

The lower levels of the monastery are very well preserved. Except for the rooms exposed to the fierce winds, most of the chambers are perfectly intact. Those with noteworthy contents are described below.

Room 1: This small room is barricaded shut from the inside. Getting in requires some work with an axe. The room contains the dried bodies of six Hill Martian nomads. A Routine: Observation task roll indicates suicide as the cause of death.

Room 2: This room contains the cleaned skeletons of four Hill Martians. Their remaining weapons and equipment are identical to the six in the first room, but they seem to have died violently.

Room 3: This room apparently served the monks as a bathing-chamber for ritual purification. It still holds water—apparently the bath is spring-fed—and would make an ideal water supply for the expedition.

Room 4: This is one of five storerooms near the old kitchens. While the others hold only the corroded remnants of food, this one contains tightly sealed stone jars of chemicals. The chemicals include nitric acid, hydrochloric acid, glucose solution, distilled water, ammonia, mercury, kerosene, powdered sulfur (about 50 pounds), sodium hydroxide and hydrogen peroxide. Each requires a Routine: Chemistry roll to identify. Note that the acids, the sodium hydroxide and the peroxide can all cause damage if touched.

Room 5: This small room appears to be a temple or shrine of some sort. There is an altar in the center of the room, with an elaborate crystal and bronze case on top of it. Within the case is a strange relic—the skull of an unknown creature. If removed from the case or handled, it will crumble to dust.

Room 6: This large room appears to be a temple and is decorated with statues of four unknown Martian gods. The doors have all been barricaded, but a large hole has been made in the floor—from beneath. The room contains the picked skeletons of 12 Martians. Anyone making a Formidable: Observation roll will notice traces of powdered sulfur on the floor outside the barricaded doors.

Room 7: Of four library chambers, this is the only one that has not been completely ruined by centuries of wind. The books are all works of ancient Martian architecture and engineering, mostly concerned with the construction of cities and fortifications.

Room 8: This chamber was apparently the infirmary. It contains a set of surprisingly modern surgical instruments. There are also some handwritten medical tomes in old Martian dialect. A stone tank in one corner holds enough sleep gas to fill the room. Anyone breathing the gas must make an Impossible: Endurance roll to avoid falling asleep for an hour.

Room 9: This room appears to be an armory. It holds 24 pikes, 12 swords, 12 crossbows and 12 muskets. Only the swords and pikes are usable. The room opens onto a series of passages running alongside the entry halls, with concealed firing ports for crossbows or flame sprayers.

Room 10: This cell was the living area of the scientist who created the Thing (see page 83). It contains his notebooks, written in the obscure Khalian technical dialect. Anyone reading them gains three extra Biochemistry research dice, and discovers the Thing's vulnerability to sulfur by making a Difficult: Biology or Chemistry task roll.

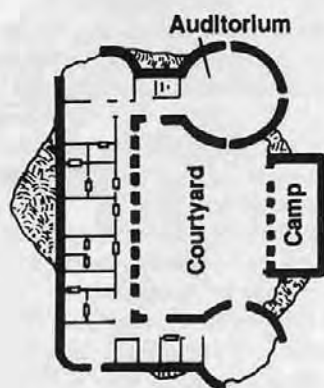
Room 11: This bedroom has been barricaded shut from within. It holds the dried mummies of three monks. Two appear to have been violently killed. They show signs of cannibalism to anyone making a Formidable: Observation roll. The third appears to be a suicide.

Room 12: This chamber's domed ceiling depicts the constellations as they were 5000 years ago. The room contains an elaborate and corroded brass orrery. Curiously, the orrery has three extra planets beyond Neptune! The chamber immediately to the north contains sacramental vestments, including a garment the PCs may recognize as a vacuum suit.

Room 13: Fed by an underground spring, the cistern was the main water supply

of the monastery. Observant individuals notice puddles of water on the floor between the edge of the pool and the door. The small room to the north is an icehouse. The Thing spends most of its time in the cistern, under the water and tucked neatly into the deepest part. In the dark room, the creature is almost impossible to spot.

Entry Level



Room 14: This chamber holds the monastery's treasures. Entry is through a small chamber with two doors, decorated with small allegorical figures of the arts and sciences. The small chamber is a trap. To get into the main treasury, characters must allow the outer door to close, then press the images of the 10 gods in the order in which they appear around the walls of the temple on the surface level. If the images are pressed in the wrong order once, nothing happens. After a second failure, the ceiling starts to descend. It requires an Impossible: Strength roll to open the outer door by force; the inner door cannot be forced open without dynamite.

Within the treasury are gold, relics and jewels worth £1000, plus the archives of the monastery, written on metal scrolls. One of the relics is an ancient Martian ray pistol. It has a range of 1000 yards, fires four times per turn, and does three wounds per hit. Firing will explode the gun on a 2D6 roll of 2. Each shot fired increases the chance by 1. The gun will explode with a power of 2.

Room 15: The researcher using this lab was trying to build a freeze ray, and his half-finished device still occupies the center of the room. Activating it requires an Easy: Electricity or Physics roll. On a failed roll, nothing happens. On a successful roll, the machine can be turned on—in which case it immediately shorts out and destroys itself. Anyone studying the device gets one Ether research die.

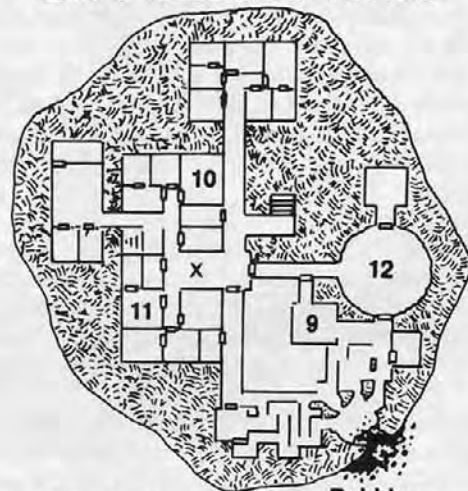
Room 16: This lab has a wall of cages containing the bones of small animals. Its purpose is unknown.

Room 17: This was the lab where the Thing was created. The room is such a shambles that nothing of value can be learned by inspection. Two skeletons

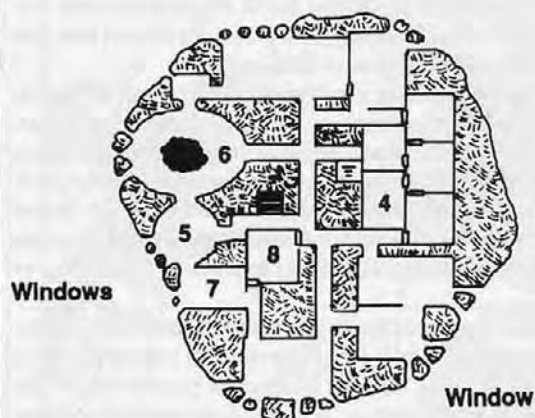
Third Floor



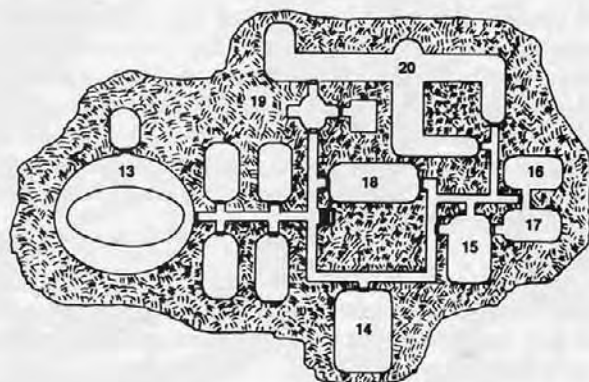
Ground Floor



Second Floor



Underground





lie amidst the rubble, completely crushed.

Room 18: The wine cellar holds over 100 bottles of Martian wines, all gone to vinegar and completely undrinkable.

Room 19: In this embalming room and funeral temple, bodies were prepared for placement in the crypt. Large jars of resin and scented herbs stand against one wall.

Room 20: For centuries, all the dead monks were mummified and placed in this crypt complex. The Thing has gone through the tomb, devouring the bodies and scattering the bones and shrouds upon the floor. Gold ornaments and jewelry worth approximately £50 are strewn amid the bones.

SLADE'S PLAN

Big Jack Slade is more interested in the pursuit of wealth than the pursuit of knowledge. While the expedition is surveying the upper floors of the monastery, he recruits two Martians for a small project of his own. One evening, after everyone has gone to bed, Slade and his henchmen slip away and go looking for valuables in the lower levels of the complex. The first anyone learns of this is when horrible screams sound from down inside the rock, awakening everyone in camp. Dyer decides to lead a search party, leaving one person behind to watch the camp.

The search party finds the crushed body of one Martian at the spot marked X on the Ground Floor map. Slade and the other Martian are nowhere to be found—in panic, they fled downward, and they are now hiding out in the chamber adjoining room 13.

Dyer and the PCs may wander through the complex before eventually encountering the creature. When it does appear, the Thing will attack suddenly, perhaps killing one or more NPC before anyone can react. Gunfire will drive it away, but only temporarily. Its regenerative powers make killing it very difficult.

DEFEATING THE THING

The party can try to rescue Big Jack and the Martian, destroy the Thing, or abandon the monastery and flee aboard the steam flyer. If the PCs have learned of the Thing's vulnerability to sulfur, then destroying it only requires finding a way to hit the monster with enough sulfur to kill it. If they do not know about its weakness, the adventurers may try to exterminate the Thing through sheer firepower. This may or may not succeed. The flyer's Nordenfelt may give the party the edge.

If all else fails, the PCs may simply decide to flee for their lives aboard the steam flyer, leaving the monastery to guard its secrets amid the desert sands. Perhaps there really are some things man was not meant to know.

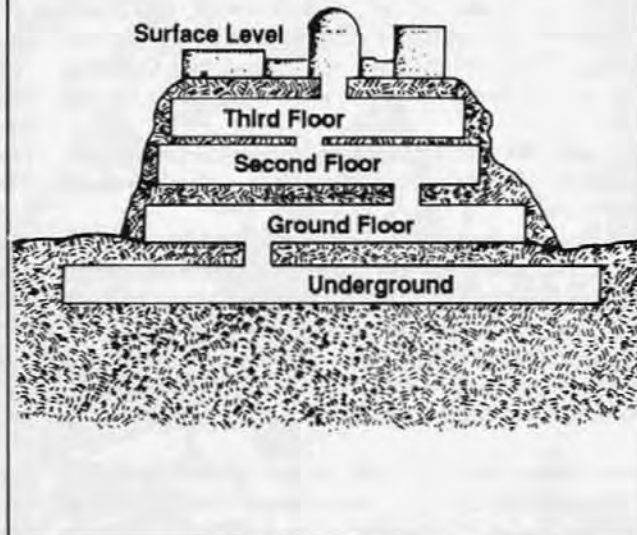
THE THING

The Thing was created thousands of years ago by one of the scholars of Tasharvan in an attempt to make artificial life. Unfortunately, he succeeded. The Thing killed all the monks or drove them away. For the past few centuries, it has lived in the monastery, remaining dormant for years at a time, preying on anything that enters the complex. The Thing appears as a horrible mass of squirming, slime-covered organs and wriggling tentacles. Dozens of huge, red eyes peer from its amorphous body. Wet, toothless mouths gape and suck on every side.

The Thing's huge body covers four hexes, and the monster has a Move of 20. It can attack by grabbing with up to four tentacles, crushing victims with its body or bludgeoning them with a large pseudopod (treat as a tail). The Thing has 16 hit points and regenerates two wounds each turn. It has an armor value of 2 against unarmed or bashing attacks. It is immune to all poisons or gases, with one exception—sulfur has a powerful corrosive effect on it. A pound of sulfur touching the Thing will cause 1D6 wounds, which cannot be regenerated.

Weapons: Tentacles (4, 4, 2, 3), Crush (1, 2, 0, 4) and Tail (1, 3, 3, 2). The Thing can also use its tentacles to grab victims, with a Strength of 7. Grabbed victims can then be crushed automatically. The Thing can secrete a thick, gluey mucus over anyone hit by a crush or tentacle attack. The mucus will halve the victim's Agility.

Side View



PROFESSOR CHARLES DYER (GREEN NPC)

A professor of archaeology at Cambridge University, Dyer is rapidly making a name for himself as a leader in the field. Rejecting the older school of flamboyant, treasure-hunting archaeologists, Dyer has pioneered the use of careful, methodical techniques in excavating ancient sites. Despite his great intellect and scientific expertise, he can be somewhat gullible.

Motives: Knowledge, Careful.

Appearance: Dyer is a tall, slender, ascetic-looking man. He is naturally quiet and reveals little about himself. He seldom gets excited or upset.

Attribute Skills

Str:	2	Fisticuffs 1, Throwing 1, Close Combat 1 (edged)
Agil:	2	Stealth 1
End:	4	Wilderness Travel 3 (mapping), Marksmanship 1 (rifle)
Int:	6	Observation 7, Science 6 (archaeology), Engineering 2 (earthworks)
Chr:	3	Eloquence 2, Linguistics 4 (French, Khallan, Parhooni, Umbran)
Soc:	4	Riding 3 (horse), Pilot 1 (steam flyer)

BIG JACK SLADE (TRAINED NPC)

Big Jack Slade is an Australian who came to Mars seeking wealth and excitement. He makes a marginal living by hunting rare animals and serving as a guide. Slade dreams of striking it rich and retiring to a life of luxury. He seldom worries about trifles like the law, and he keeps his word only when he has to.

Motives: Greedy, Liar.

Appearance: Slade is a huge man, surprisingly nimble for his size. He is always very hearty and friendly—and is quick to ask favors of new-found friends. Slade is never without his large hunting knife and elephant gun.

Attribute Skills

Str:	5	Fisticuffs 4, Throwing 2, Close Combat 3 (edged)
Agil:	5	Stealth 4, Marksmanship 4 (rifle), Crime 1 (forgery)
End:	5	Wilderness Travel 6 (foraging), Fieldcraft 3, Tracking 3, Swimming 1
Int:	1	
Chr:	3	Eloquence 2, Linguistics 2 (Koline, Umbran)
Soc:	2	Riding 1 (horse), Piloting 1 (steam flyer), Leadership 1 Ω

She watched me for a moment, reflexively squinting her left eye as if she were sighting down a rifle barrel at me. "I like someone willing to shift tactics when the opening gambit fails. You have five minutes." She released my hand after she slid onto the stool across from me and ordered a Gimlet from the bartender.

I remained silent until he had withdrawn, then idly drew an A in the moisture ring on the bar. "A young man you recommended for work here was killed last night."

"The albino, Albion. I know." She sipped her drink, then set it back on the bar. "I learned that early this morning when I checked my computer system. I returned from the Yukon immediately. Updating my schedule, I saw the dinner notation and came right over. Do you know who killed him?"

I shook my head. "No, but I knew Albion, and I know people who will be sorry he died. I want to find out who did him, and you're about the only lead I have."

"I see." She dipped a finger in her drink and raised it toward her mouth. A droplet hung from her nail like venom from a scorpion's sting, then she licked it off with a flick of her tongue. "Albion repaired the stereo in my Mako and asked me to mention him to my friends. I did, and a couple suggested I get him a job here."

"I guess I'm missing the connection." I popped a peanut into my mouth. "Why would you want a mohawked street punk working here?"

Selene crossed her legs. Her outfit, a dark green silk blouse under a dark green blazer and tight black skirt, left a lot of leg for me to look at as she did so. "This club is for individuals who are adventurers. We dare go out and challenge Mother Nature in her wondrous and magical splendor."

She pointed through the doorway back toward where a gallery of holograms showed images of members with creatures they had killed. "The membership thrives on going to exotic places, seeing exotic things."

"And killing them?"

"Among other things." She half-shut her eyes and studied me over the edge of her glass. "We are thrill seekers."

"So bringing a piece of Seattle street life into your club is a thrill."

"You are edging toward asking if I think Albion was chosen as prey by a member of our group." She toyed with the stem of her glass, slowly turning it so the light glowed off the liquor's legs. "We live for danger."

My green eyes narrowed. "And stalking Albion through the concrete world that is his natural habitat wouldn't be dangerous?"

"We may be the ultimate predators, but we are not murderers. Bringing someone like Albion in here is importing some of the danger from the streets, yes. He is not what we normally expect to see here, so he was a curiosity." She clasped her hands together over her knee. "For a while, we maintained a cheetah and a Bengal tiger here before certain Creature Liberationists started to threaten us."

The Old One howled in the back of my mind. "I can imagine them seeing this as a temple of death, no problem."

"But they do not know what we truly do, for this is also a sanctuary for life." She laughed easily. "Between this club and all the animal freedom groups combined, who do you think has spent more money providing habitats for the endangered and threatened species out there?"

"Is this a trick question?" I frowned. "They do."

"No, they do not." The skin tightened around her eyes. "The area where I went hunting a snow moose, for example, is all a private preserve purchased and maintained through this club. Our members, either through the club or on their own, have placed acres and acres of threatened wetlands and forests into park systems, both public and private. Did you realize that since the latter half of the 20th century it has been the hunters and the licensing fees they pay that has guaranteed wildlife management and, in many cases,

actually allowed the animal population exceed that of Colonial times?"

I sat back and did my best to look contrite. "No, I did not realize that."

"It is true." She casually waved her hand toward the other patrons in the bar. "The membership here is also involved in many philanthropic projects right here in Seattle. Part of that is reflected in our willingness to employ someone like Albion."

"Do you think someone took this 'preserve' idea too far with Albion and killed him?"

"I hope not." She leaned forward, and I brought my ear close to her mouth. "In a place like this there are always rumors of someone having hunted the most dangerous prey. Liquor dreams and vaporware, but it is possible someone decided to make them real. If they did, I am responsible because I brought him here."

I leaned back and took a pull on my beer. I knew from Stealth's description of the weapon that killed Albion that commissioning it would have required the sort of money that someone in the club certainly would possess. It also struck me as absolutely possible that someone could have decided that harvesting a little two-footed quarry in the city beat freezing in Alaska to bag a rack of antlers. Of course, the one thing I knew that she did not was that Albion was only the latest in a series.

"These stories ever center on one person here?"

She looked up and didn't even try to hide her surprise. "No, not that I know of." She drained her glass. "This is very disturbing." She concentrated, her dark brows arrowing down toward the bridge of her nose. "Come with me, and we will discuss this with the director."

I glanced at my watch, then shook my head. "Can't, I'm meeting someone. Albion's in no hurry. This can wait for a day or so."

She nodded, then stared down at her glass and the liquid pooling in the bottom. "Are you free tomorrow night? I can arrange for us to meet the director." Her expression sharpened and her nostrils flared as she watched me out of the corner of her eye. "You will be my guest tomorrow evening for dinner."

I waved the offer off. "Not necessary, Ms. Reece, really."

"I insist." Her smile warmed—and warmed me. "You intrigue me. You bluff your way in here, then admit your deception. You are different from most."

"Exotic?"

"Challenging, Mr..."

"Kies. Wolfgang Kies."

"Accept, Mr. Kies. Anyone here can tell you that, as a hunter, I am relentless."

"So I am in your sights?"

She eyed me very frankly, and the Old One started a low growl in the back of my head. "You are too imaginative to be a literalist, Mr. Kies. I find pursuit more thrilling than a kill, and my taste in men does not run to corpses."

I caught the invitation in her voice, and the warning that whatever happened would be on her terms, and her terms alone. "Seven, here?"

She took up my left hand and gave it a squeeze. "Twenty-four hours, then."

I nodded to her and gave her a kiss on the cheek. Walking away from the club, Albion became a ghost. Learning who killed him had become immaterial as a reason for my willingness to meet Selene the next night. She knew it. I knew it.

Wolf season was open. Ω

Don't miss the exciting conclusion to "Fair Game" in Challenge 63. And if you like Michael Stackpole's work, you'll love his Dark Conspiracy novels, A Gathering Evil and Evil Ascending, published by GDW.

KAFKA



DARK CONSPIRACY



Curiosity is one of our species' best developed traits. It is likely that curiosity led our ancestors out of the warm seas and later from the safety of the trees. Our curiosity is still with us, and it may well lead us to great things. Of course, it is said that curiosity killed the cat. Now that I have seen what curiosity can lead to, I think that cat got off easy.

The human thirst for knowledge. Who knows what gleaming heights it may lead us to—or what dark abyss.

Dr. Carl Sands, SRI Director (early 21st century)

This adventure is set in the environs of the Special Research Institute (SRI), a scientific institute assigned to study and devise counters to the Dark Minions. The PCs may be in or near Columbus, Ohio, when the trouble begins, may be brought to Columbus by a contact, or may hear a strange report on the news and decide to investigate. Or the PCs may be known by reputation and contacted by SRI. If the PCs have government, law enforcement, scientific or academic contacts connected to SRI, they may be invited to Columbus to provide SRI with data on their experiences with paranormal activities. Each invited person will receive a round-trip plane ticket, plus a room at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Columbus.

While a great deal of Ohio is no longer under control by the forces of law and order, Columbus is still fairly stable. The presence of the Ohio State University (OSU) and such high-tech institutes as Batelle Memorial have ensured the survival of Columbus as a viable entity. Some areas, especially those between Ohio State and downtown, are fairly bad, but not too much worse than in the 1990s.

Columbus Airport is still in operation. Ohio State is in good shape but is considerably smaller than in the 1990s. If the PCs need to purchase equipment, they can find several army surplus stores, martial art supply stores and sporting good stores in the area. If they have the money and connections, they may have access to Ohio State's computer network or science facilities. Of course, Columbus is still the fast food and beer capital of the Midwest, so the PCs will have no trouble in that area.

By Michael C. LaBossiere

VAMPIRES OF COLUMBUS

The first hint of anything out of the ordinary is a story in the local newspaper, which reports that the bodies of two OSU students were found in a drainpipe by the OSU baseball field. The tiny, old car that belonged to one of the young men was found abandoned. Friends of the youths report that they were last seen leaving a local bar with two young women.

If the PCs investigate, friends of the young men will reveal that they met two women in the bar and left with them. One of the friends will say that the men looked dazed, almost hypnotized, "but that was probably just from the beer." If the PCs examine the bodies or get access to the reports, they will learn that the bodies have been drained of blood.

What has happened is that several bloodkin vampires have made Columbus their hunting ground. There will be several more feedings over the next few weeks, with similar stories in each case. (See page 214 of *Dark Conspiracy* for details on bloodkin vampires.)

BLOODKIN INCIDENT

While the PCs are at SRI, a group of college students are taking a tour of the institute. As the students pass through the security check, one of them is revealed to be a Dark Minion by the security scanner. The entity is a bloodkin vampire masquerading as a sorority girl.

The bloodkin vampire actually ended up at SRI by accident, ignorant of SRI's true purpose. It now realizes that SRI poses a threat and uses its empathic abilities to warn its companions, who will contact a group of Dark Minions.

The bloodkin does its best to escape, using the students as cover (especially those easily influenced by its feigned appearance). But the guards and robots (and PCs, if they choose to become involved) are able to kill it before it can get away.

The incident may receive some news coverage. However, SRI has deals with many news services to keep things quiet.

UFO

A local tabloid reports that a flying saucer landed in Tuttle Park, near the OSU campus. If the

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PCs investigate, they will find several people who will admit to seeing strange lights in the area. If they use a Geiger counter at the reported landing site, the PCs will find that the radiation levels are higher than normal. They will also find the crisped and highly radioactive remains of several squirrels stuck to the trees. And they may discover two sets of abnormally deep bootprints leading out of the park. The prints seem to start out of nowhere, as if the walkers came from the sky. In fact, a UFO did land in the park, and it dropped off two cyborgs to aid the bloodkin vampires.

CYBORG ATTACK I

One alien cyborg will recon SRI, breaking in at night and examining the facilities. It manages to enter the building, and it kills two guards and a technician. Eventually, it ends up in the biological research room, where Dr. Helen Harnst kills it. The stress of the alien cyborg attack triggers a temporary transformation (see Dr. Helen Harnst, page 80), and Harnst destroys the surprised being. She then blacks out and honestly cannot remember what happened. The responding guards find Harnst unconscious on the floor, with the remains of the trashed cyborg scattered around her.

CYBORG ATTACK II

The second alien cyborg targets the PCs for its attack. It needs more information, but is afraid to enter SRI, so it plans to capture personnel and interrogate them. The cyborg will observe the PCs for a few days and wait for the ideal time to strike. It is not averse to killing any bystanders, but will try to minimize its "visibility." Exactly what happens is left to the PCs and referee, but killing the adventurers off would certainly cut the adventure short.

Alien Cyborgs

Strength: 10	Education: 4	Move: 3/10/18/35
Constitution: 7	Charisma: 2	Skill/Dam: 7/7
Agility: 8	Empathy: 1	Hits: 25/50
Intelligence: 4	Initiative: 6	#Appear: 1

Special: Internal armor value of 1.

Equipment: Berreta M92S with a spare clip, MP-7 with two spare clips.

DEATH OF THE VAMPIRES

The local newscast reports an incidence of violence at a local bar. According to the report, a woman attempted to drag two sorority girls from a bar. When three men tried to interfere, she apparently killed two of them and severely wounded the third, using a razor or extremely sharp knife. The woman then proceeded to drag the two girls out of the bar. They were not seen again.

If the PCs investigate, they may be able to find out the following: The autopsies of the bodies reveal that they were cut by razor-sharp organic material, similar in composition to human nails, but with some very odd chemicals and structural anomalies. The two men apparently died of very rapid blood loss, "almost as if it had been pumped out of them."

If the PCs talk to the person who has been hospitalized, they can see that he has thin, but deep, cuts on his arms and throat. He describes what happened: "I was at the bar, when this older lady grabbed the two chicks me and my buddies were talking to. We went to stop her, but she grabbed Dave's throat, and he went pale and collapsed. Bill went down next, and she got hold of me. Her grip was like being burned and getting a bunch of really deep paper cuts at once. It was awful, dude."

What really happened is that the transformed Dr. Harnst went hunting the bloodkin vampires. She found them and killed them, and took out a few innocent bystanders in the process. She didn't intend to kill the others, but could not help herself.

KILLINGS

Harnst's new biology requires her to consume human blood to stay alive. At first, she lives off of SRI's medical blood supply. Then she is forced to go out on the hunt. Her kills make the news. In each case, the victim is slashed and drained of blood. Each killing is more brutal and savage than the last. SRI asks the PCs to investigate the killings. It is up to the referee what the PCs learn. Harnst sets up a false trail leading out of the state and recommends that the PCs follow it. But while the PCs are on a wild goose chase, she is taking over SRI.

QUEEN

Eventually, Harnst's empathic powers enable her to take control of SRI. She has the robots disabled



(since they would attack), and she uses the place as her base. The willpower-drained personnel follow her orders and even kill (or die) for her.

It is up to the PCs to stop Dr. Harnst. She does her best to keep the PCs from guessing what has happened, but she becomes increasingly sloppy as her hunger begins to take her over completely.

FINISH

If the PCs defeat Dr. Harnst and retake SRI, Nightwatch (a local, covert Dark Minion-hunting group) is heavily in their debt, and they can expect a great deal of support from the group. If the PCs fail, Harnst will plague Columbus for months, until a Nightwatch team takes her out.

ENVIRONS

SRI is located northwest of the Ohio State campus. The area once contained some poultry science buildings and empty fields. Also in the vicinity are residential and commercial buildings, and a park-like area containing an artificial lake.

Residential Areas: These areas consist of apartment buildings and private homes for people associated with SRI or the university.

Commercial Areas: The commercial areas consist of small stores (drug stores, bookstores, etc). There are also several support industries for SRI (mostly small- to mid-sized manufacturers).

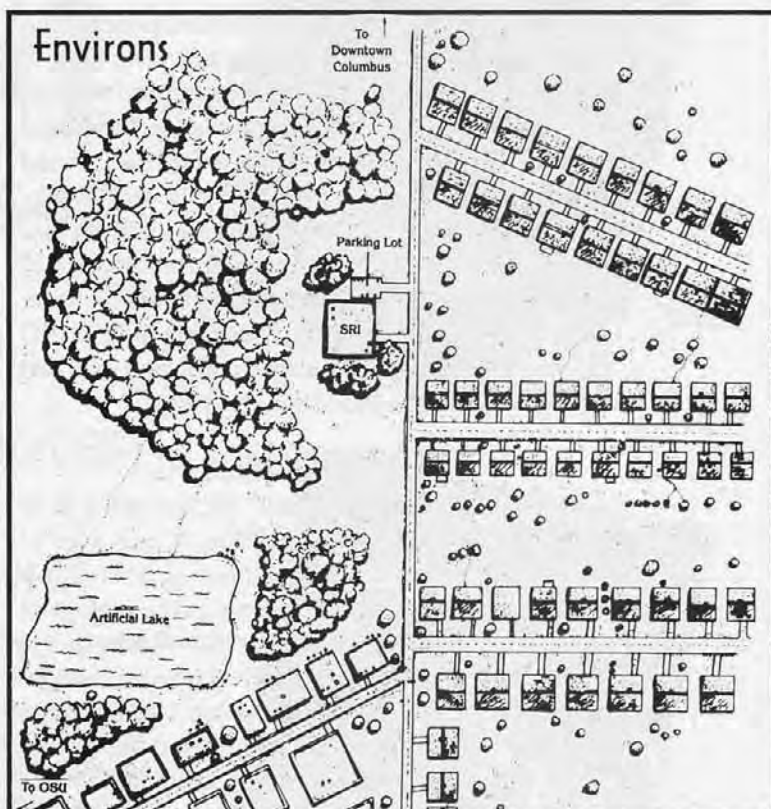
Artificial Lake: The lake is used as a reservoir as the rivers in the area are unsafe.

SPECIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

SRI has been in operation for three years. It was constructed after a private corporation purchased the land (which was very inexpensive due to the damage caused by student riots and the financial difficulty of OSU).

Publicly, SRI is devoted to high-tech research in the areas of space sciences, weapons technology and exotic biological research. More specifically (and secretly), SRI is dedicated to researching the Dark Minions and their technology, and in developing weapons and equipment to be used against them. SRI is closely connected with Nightwatch.

The SRI building is a brick and granite structure which would not look out of place on a college



campus. The institute's exterior door requires an ID check. Interior doors require an ID check and code. Some areas have more stringent security, as detailed below.

A total of 40 administrators, technicians and scientists work for SRI. They are highly skilled in their area of expertise, but are considered Novices in combat. Six security guards are on duty at any time. Four are Veteran NPCs, and two are Elite. They are armed with G-11s and M9s, and they wear Kevlar vests.

Two Kraus Maffei-Deere GB-2000s patrol the area. They are programmed to recognize and attack certain known Dark Minion races. A RamTech Roboguard-III, available for special situations, is also programmed to recognize and attack Dark Minions. The robots are also programmed to deal with more conventional intruders. Linked to the institute's CPU and regularly monitored, they can be controlled from the institute (access codes and ID checks required, of course). They have been programmed to warn unarmed humans before engaging them, but will attack Dark Minions instantly.



Ground Floor

Lobby/Security: The tastefully decorated lobby includes a security desk with built-in monitors, door controls and ID checker/maker. All the equipment is computer-controlled and requires ID checks and access codes. Thermal and sound-echo sensors can tell humans from nonhumans. The detection of a nonhuman sounds alarms and puts the institute on full alert (Roboguards and human guards respond).

Labs: Each lab has a security door (ID card and a thumbprint scanner). The interior of each lab is filled with high-tech equipment. The commercial work of the institute is done in these rooms.

Offices: Each office contains a desk, terminal and so forth. The scientists, administrators and techs who are in the commercial section have their offices here.

Computer: The computer is a highly advanced model and is linked to various terminals in the building. The room has a security door which requires an ID card, code and a thumbprint scan.

Power Plant: This room contains SRI's backup power plant. The door requires an ID card and code.

Storage: The outer doors require an ID card, code and thumbprint scan. The large lift plate is used to transport large or heavy items to the second floor.

Second Floor

The second floor is where the high-security work is done (including Nightwatch). The elevators to this floor require IDs and codes to operate.

Biological Research (BR): Work done on biological or quasi-biological (e.g., nanotechnology) material is conducted in this environmentally controlled laboratory. The room is airtight and has a carefully controlled atmosphere. Stored in a special freezer unit (which requires ID card, code and thumbprint to open) are several samples from Dark Minions and other odd creatures.

Airlock: The airlock is used to preserve the integrity of the BR room. It requires an ID card, code and thumbprint to operate. A safety feature prevents both doors from being open at once.

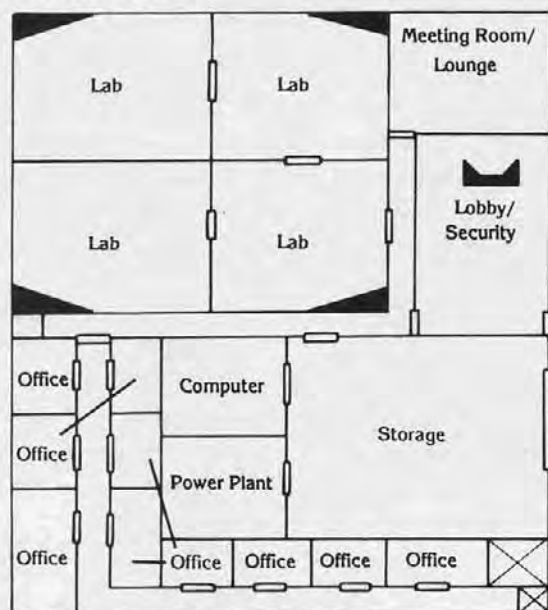
Labs: These are similar to the labs on the first floor, except the equipment is even more advanced. One lab is used for Dark Minion research and contains several pieces of DarkTek (in security containers requiring a special electronic key and a code).

Offices: These are the offices for the scientists, techs and administrators who work on this floor. They are similar to the offices on the first floor.

Special Storage: Anything needing special storage conditions is kept in a compartment here.

Production/Heavy Equipment: This room contains the equipment needed to fabricate prototypes, and special tools and equipment.

SRI Ground Floor



DR. HELEN HARNST

Strength: 3 Constitution: 4 Agility: 4
Intelligence: 8 Education: 9 Charisma: 3
Empathy: 2 Initiative: 1 # Appear: 1

Skills: Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 2, Willpower 4, Biology 7, Chemistry 7, Medical 6, Computer Operation 2, Instruction 2.

Dr. Harnst is obsessed with her hatred of the Dark Minions. Her best friend was killed by Dark Minions several years ago, and she swore to avenge his death. She came across a DarkTek device that resembled human nanotechnology experiments in many ways, and with it she has been working on a virus to retaylor her body to more effectively fight the Dark Minions. Cells from the recently killed bloodkin vampire provided her with the breakthrough she needed. Unfortunately, her experiment has gone



horribly awry, and she is being transformed into something inimical to humans and Dark Minions.

Dr. Harnst keeps a log of her activities. She writes of having an inspiration regarding the DarkTek device after a particularly vivid nightmare. The next part of the log details her attempts to develop a viral reconstructor to alter the human body. The log ends with descriptions of increasingly vivid nightmares, followed by new insights.

The device Dr. Harnst was working with is actually an intelligent organism from a Dark dimension. Its function is to convert life forms of other dimensions into forms suitable for its masters' uses. It sent Harnst the nightmares that provided her inspiration. Once it had the bloodkin cells (similar to those of the creatures of its dimension) it enabled Harnst to produce the viral tailors, which worked far faster and were far more radical than she expected. Her transformation is in four stages:

Stage I

Strength: 5 Constitution: 6 Agility: 6
Intelligence: 8 Education: 9 Charisma: 5
Empathy: 4 Initiative: 2 # Appear: 1

Skills: Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 2, Willpower 4, Biology 7, Chemistry 7, Medical 6, Computer Operation 2, Instruction 2, Melee Combat 2.

Harnst reaches this stage a week after her analysis of the bloodkin vampire. She is increasingly aggressive but still in control. Under stress, there is a 60% chance that she will shift to stage two and then black out, with no memory of the shift.

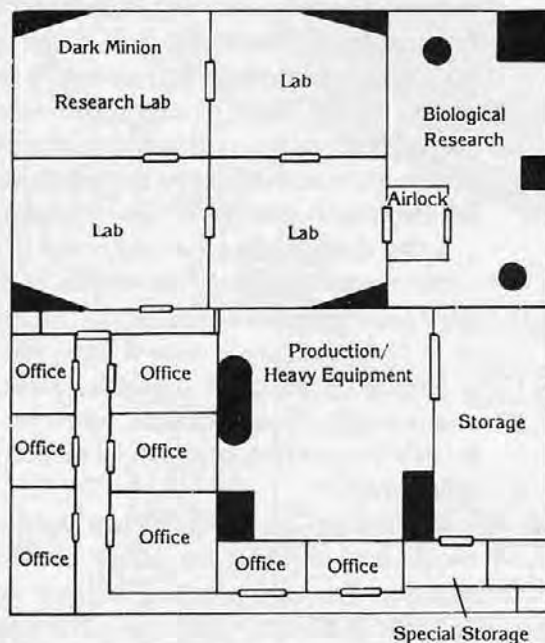
Stage II

Strength: 9 Constitution: 8 Agility: 7
Intelligence: 7 Education: 7 Charisma: 7
Empathy: 6 Initiative: 2 # Appear: 1

Skills: Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 2, Willpower 4, Biology 7, Chemistry 7, Medical 6, Computer Operation 2, Instruction 2, Melee Combat 4, Human Empathy 1, Project Emotion 1, Project Thought 1, Willpower Drain 1.

Harnst reaches the second stage a week after the first. She is very violent and in danger of losing control. She is unstable since the viruses are restructuring her brain. Her hands have altered enough to be treated as knives in combat.

SRI Second Floor



Stage III

Strength: 11 Constitution: 11 Agility: 8
Intelligence: 7 Education: 7 Charisma: 8
Empathy: 7 Initiative: 3 # Appear: 1

Skills: Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 2, Willpower 4, Biology 7, Chemistry 7, Medical 6, Computer Operation 2, Instruction 2, Melee Combat 5, Human Empathy 3, Project Emotion 3, Project Thought 3, Willpower Drain 3.

Harnst enters this stage a week after the second. She is almost completely inhuman. It is at this stage that she kills the two bloodkin vampires. Harnst now drains blood through her hands, via the modified structures in her palms and fingers. She heals like a bloodkin vampire.

Stage IV

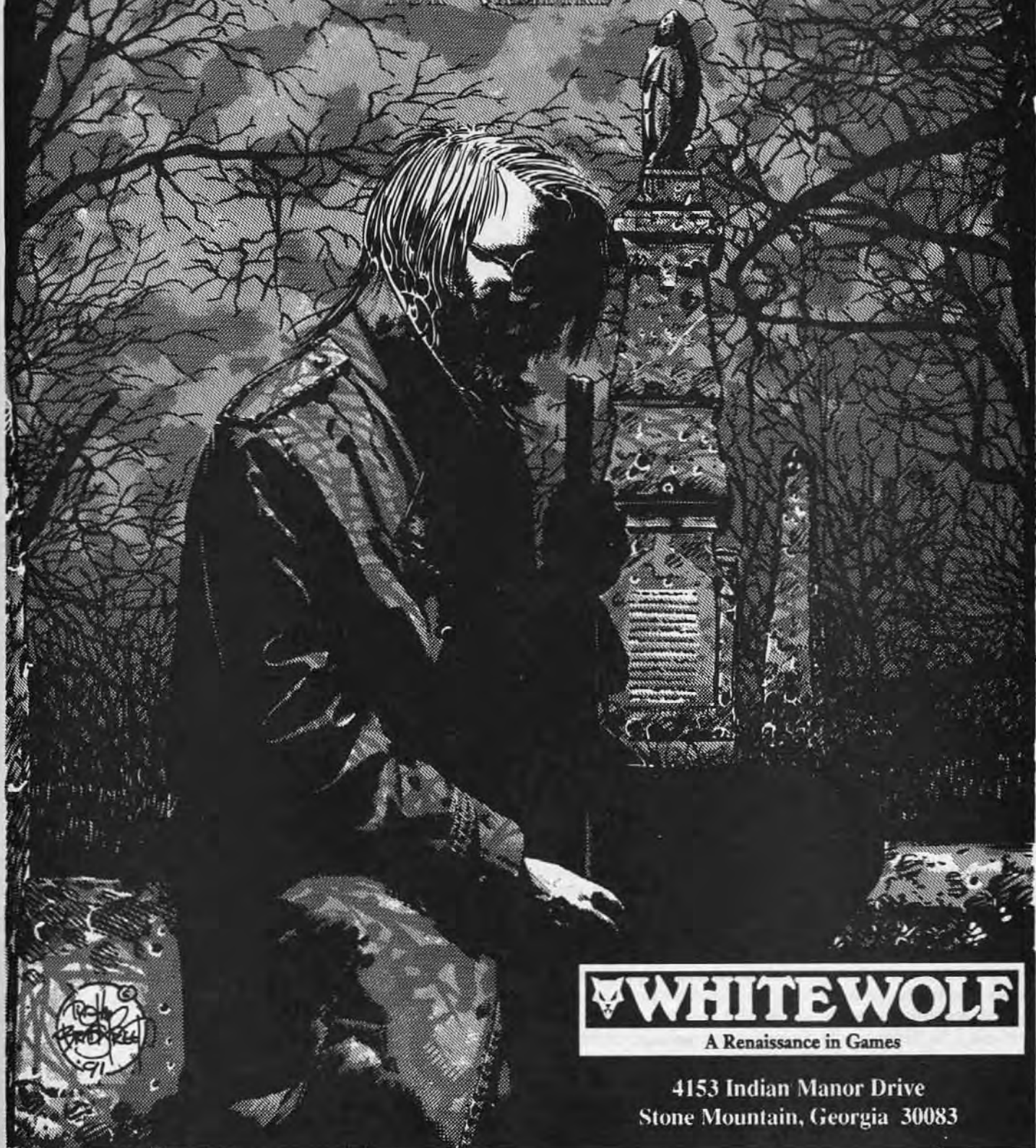
Strength: 11 Constitution: 11 Agility: 8
Intelligence: 7 Education: 7 Charisma: 10
Empathy: 9 Initiative: 3 # Appear: 1

Skills: Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 2, Willpower 4, Biology 7, Chemistry 7, Medical 6, Computer Operation 2, Instruction 2, Melee Combat 6, Human Empathy 6, Project Emotion 6, Project Thought 6, Willpower Drain 6.

Harnst is completely inhuman. Her only thoughts are to control as many people as possible and to feed. Ω

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FORCED ENTRY

By Roman J. Andron

Word comes to the characters that a big corporation on Acheron needs a group of special operations trained strikers as soon as possible. Following up the rumors leads to a safe house which doubles as a mercs' bar in the bad part of town. Most of the patrons are scruffy or scarred, and none pay attention to the characters, preferring to watch the video feeds mounted on the ceiling. Questioning the bartender leads the characters through a slatted canvas curtain to a back room, where they meet Winston Coombs, Hyperdyne operations executive.

After looking over their credentials, Coombs extends them an offer of employment at the standard contract rate and hustles them out of the bar to the port facility. Coombs needs a striker team to recover a Hyperdyne cargo vessel, the *Walbran*, taken over by pirates. Any pirates aboard the *Walbran* are to be "terminated with extreme prejudice." Hyperdyne, he explains, is seeking to crack down on piracy of its small vessels. At the port, the characters and Coombs board a dropship which takes them up to an orbiting frigate, *Mendes*, a sleek ultramodern design. There, the characters are further briefed. The *Walbran's* crew of 10 is described as a standard freighter crew. The cargo is listed as telecommunications transponders.

The *Mendes* gets under way within an hour of the briefing, carrying the characters, Coombs, five technicians, a corporate strike team and its own crew. No one except Coombs will have anything to do with the characters, looking down on them as "mercenary scum."

THE REAL STORY

Coombs is actually part of a Hyperdyne damage control team trying to avert a major intercorporate crisis. A few months ago, shipwreck survivor Ellen Ripley convinced Weyland-Yutani to field a Colonial Marine team to Acheron. That team had only three survivors, and word leaked out that an entire terraforming colony was also destroyed. Hyperdyne agents inside Weyland-Yutani confirmed rumors of the destruction, admitted that a dangerous xenomorph was involved and revealed that Weyland-Yutani was considering the xenomorph as a bioweapon. Naturally, Hyperdyne executives were interested. When Weyland-Yutani scientific and military forces moved to secure Acheron and search for the xenomorph, Hyperdyne agents went along.

Alien specimens were recovered by the Hyperdyne agents. One of these specimens, a facehugger code-named Ashgrate, was placed in a stasis tube and diverted to a pickup zone where a Hyperdyne dropship was standing by with a corporate commando team. The specimen was taken aboard the *Walbran*, which was a covert Hyperdyne troop transport disguised as a light freighter. The *Walbran* jumped out of Acheron before Weyland-Yutani and marine forces garrisoned there knew what had happened.

Unfortunately, the stasis field around Ashgrate failed in transit, releasing the facehugger to burrow into a hypersleep chamber and impregnate the ship's captain. The hypersleep breach caused the ship to perform an emergency awakening at JS-AC03. The crew soon found itself facing four warrior aliens and an alien-sabotaged drive system. A fierce battle ensued for control of the ship, which ended with SSgt. Susan Reynolds blowing out an airlock in a suicidal effort to kill the

creatures through an explosive decompression. The Aliens were unaffected. The *Walbran* has been at JS-AC03 ever since.

As the characters arrive at JS-AC03, they will have little trouble locating the *Walbran*. It sits in a gently decaying orbit around the jump system planet and is near the unmanned space station. Its tactical transponder transmits only intermittently, but this is sufficient for the *Mendes* to track it down and move into a salvaging position. Coombs orders the characters to don spacesuits and board the dropship, and he does the same. Three silent technicians also accompany the characters. On the ride over to the *Walbran*, the characters will be unable to see the destination. On arrival, they will discover that an airlock has been blown out, leaving a gaping hole in the hull.

WALBRAN

The *Walbran* is a light freighter with deployable cargo arms and capture gear to recover cargo pallets placed in orbit by linear accelerators or to take transfers from other ships. The capture gear and cargo arms fit under the hull in recessed sections and also permit the craft to deploy its own cargo to orbital shuttles or carryalls. The *Walbran* is unarmed. The internal arrangement consists of cramped crew quarters and large cargo bays filled with pallets and crates of electronic gear. The crew area is dark and eerily silent.

The *Walbran* has been completely depressurized, and artificial gravity and light systems have been turned off. Coombs orders the characters to locate the bridge, then sends his technicians to try to bring the ship's power, life support and gravitational systems back on-line (all Average tasks, but requiring 5D10 person-minutes each in the appropriate mechanics section to complete).

Destroyed Airlock: Examination of the airlock area shows high-explosive blast burns and numerous bullet holes in the walls. A bit farther down the hallway, the characters will find the floating, mutilated body of Reynolds. Icicles of blood spread out from her wounds like red quills, and the walls are painted with frozen blood. The body is in a spacesuit, but the suit has been torn and shredded. There are unusual resin secretions around some of the wall and ceiling corners, taking on oversized black honeycomb shapes.

Bridge: The bridge, too, has been struck by a firefight. The mate's bullet-torn body floats here, its wounds forming brilliant red icicles and suggesting that his death came soon before depressurization. Displays flicker erratically in this area, giving a ghostly strobe effect. Characters can call up the captain's log and find out about the hypersleep breach. The mate's final entries suggest that the crew is disloyal and does not want to transfer Ashgrate to Hyperdyne. Under a different, encrypted and partly garbled voice file is SSgt. Reynolds' entry, made after she killed the mate and after the rest of the crew had been killed by the Aliens. She tells of the hunt and ends with: "Things killed Jenkins with a single blow. The rest of the crew's dead as well. God knows what Hyperdyne wants these things for, sending in *Walbran-Exeter*—two ships. These things're too—there go the electronics again—failing—they must have shut them off. My only hope is that those things can't—vacuum. End..."

Characters who have skills in communications will be able to identify a large number of consoles as electronic warfare equipment. These consoles look as if they were added to the bridge after the ship was built.

Engineering: The Aliens have spent a great deal of time here, building up two large resin columns and working over the consoles with resin. They have encased four people in each column. The six men and two women are all terribly mutilated and burned, and frozen in the vacuum. All are well-muscled and wear military-style clothing and haircuts. One even has an old Colonial Marine tattoo. Facial identification scans could be run through police computers if full-face photos of the people were taken to a colony or major world. The scans would identify the dead as corporate mercenaries on retainer to Hyperdyne.

There are four eggs here, laid by the warriors shortly after their first kill. The eggs never hatched because of the icy cold of space, but the eggs are "alive," and Coombs will want them.

It is possible to rig the drives to detonate, but this needs a Spacecraft Drive Repair roll at Difficult Base Odds. Such a detonation would destroy the *Walbran* and all on-board in a nuclear fireball.

Hypersleep: A hypersleep chamber has a hole melted through its cover, and the interior is covered with frozen blood. A man's body with his chest torn open is strapped in here. Coombs can identify the body as the captain's.

Medlab: An electronic stasis jar, like the kind used for storing specimens, lies shattered on the floor.

Security Locker: This assortment of weapons should not be in a freighter's hands, including sentry guns, rocket launchers and vials of nerve agents. Some of the crates for heavy infantry weapons look as if they have been quickly torn open and unpacked.

MOVEMENT IN 0G

While the ship is without artificial gravity, all movement is done with the aid of magboots. These are standard gear for all spacesuits and consist of variable power magnets which can rip a steel mesh embedded in ship floors and hulls. Movement in these boots is as if artificial gravity were present. However, the characters can disable the magboots by a switch and can launch themselves at speeds up to three hexes per phase (18 feet per phase). On landing, they must make a Balance roll (Average) to avoid being off balance and unable to act for a number of phases equal to their velocity in hexes (one hex equals six feet).

REFEREEING THE SCENARIO

Referees should try to build an atmosphere of horror for this adventure. The characters will be aboard a ship that has an erratic electrical system. Until the airlock is sealed and the decks repressurized, the ship is a vacuum, and the only sounds are the characters' communications and their own breathing. Add to this some mutilated corpses and strange resin encrustations, and you're well on your way to a horrific atmosphere.

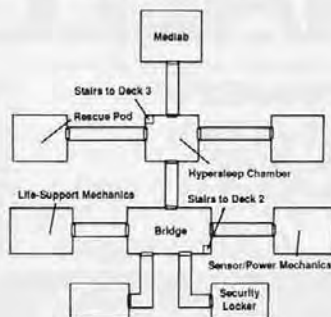
In playing out the actions of the Alien warriors, keep in mind that these creatures are both social and intelligent. When the characters first board the ship, these creatures will be roused from dormancy and begin investigating the intruders. The four Aliens will first act independently, performing reconnaissance by each going to different parts of the ship to identify the characters as prey. Any stragglers or small groups will be attacked and slain as the Aliens probe the intruders' characteristics. After the first few attacks, the Aliens will regroup and start acting as a team. They will use stealth to stalk the characters and then strike out of the darkness in a coordinated series of attacks.

Alien Movement: Aliens are quite comfortable in a 0G environment and move over long distances by launching themselves in the desired direction. They are very agile and will never be off balance. When they are not moving, they use their resin web and prehensile tail to anchor themselves at bizarre angles out of most human sight. The *Walbran* has numerous exposed pipes and crannies where Aliens can hide.

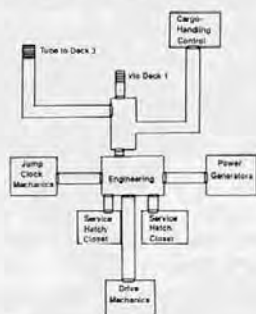
Attack Tactics: When acting alone, the Aliens will strike either from up close or from a distance, launching themselves into the prey, if necessary. The standard attack when launching is the grab, followed up by a bite if the prey is part of a group and must be quickly subdued. When operating as a group, the Aliens prefer encircling the prey, with the lead Alien attacking first and others following in a staggered sequence so as to cause maximum confusion and shock to prey.

Hunting the Aliens: The Alien warriors are very formidable opponents. Actually hunting these creatures on-board the *Walbran* is an almost suicidal challenge. The darkness hides the creatures, and the vacuum silences their telltale scurrying. Decrease the Aliens' stalking difficulty by one in addition to any other modifiers while these conditions persist. The vacuum also means that the motion trackers and any sentry guns will not work. Finally, the vacuum and darkness make spotting and engaging these creatures a Very Difficult task. All fire at Aliens uses a -12 modifier to shot accuracy if the ship is dark or a -2 if the Alien is in the path of a shoulder-lamp beam or the ship's lights

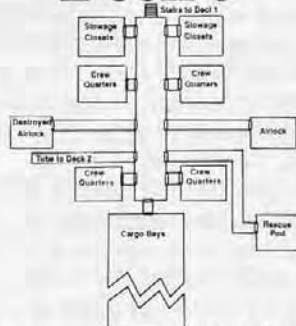
Deck 1



Deck 2



Deck 3



Highlighting indicates sections where the Aliens most commonly hide out and where encrustations adorn the walls.

have been re-powered. Remember that Aliens cannot easily be detected by thermal imaging and that passive-light enhancement systems will not work while the ship is dark. Aiming at Aliens while using thermal imaging equipment has a -(6+D6) shot accuracy modifier.

WINSTON COOMBS (CORPORATE EXECUTIVE NPC)

Coombs is a man who has given his life to Hyperdyne. For that, he enjoys great privileges. He is willing to do anything to protect Hyperdyne or enhance its position, even if it means smuggling dangerous lifeforms and sacrificing subordinates.

Coombs' personality is quite forceful. He always looks dour and is very blunt in his mannerisms. He avoids embarrassing questions by simply not answering them and will stick to his original version of events even after that story has fallen apart. Although he fancies himself a manipulator of people, his manipulations are without subtlety.

If Coombs is killed, his role can be taken over by the *Mendes* captain. Both Coombs and the captain have full knowledge of Ashgrate, and both will work to ensure that the knowledge remains secure, even if it means destroying the *Walbran*, the characters and any Colonial Marine forces in the area. Ω

Eurosource

R. Talsorian Games. \$12.00.

Written by Mark Galeotti.

80-page *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0* sourcebook.

Eurosource is, appropriately, a sourcebook covering the rest of the Western world in *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0*. In the world of the future, Europe is supposed to be better off than North America. Less crime, less violence, more culture and refinement. After all, the ESA and its orbital counterparts dictate terms to the world below, no?

Eurosource contains information on the current situations in the European countries, the history of the European Economic Community (EC), the power structures, and life and roleplaying in Europe. Three short adventures cap off the book.

The first chapter, dealing with each country's current situation, is sparse, like something that would be found in a capsule review of each country in turn. The number of countries to be covered lengthens the chapter. It mentions Germany's almost Prussian drive and determination to use its economic strength (Germany is Japan's strongest enemy in Europe), France's jealousy of its eastern neighbor and ancient antagonist, Britain's plunge to military law, Italy's schism into two countries, Spain's economic doldrums, Portugal's placidity, the warfare in Greece and Turkey, the internal struggles of the Baltics, fighting each other and trying to keep from becoming EC puppets, the Nordic states moseying along and trying to keep up, and the "Soviet Disunion." (One of the problems about recent history: Too many things are changing too swiftly for published material to keep up!) Each review does manage to give a brief idea about what is going on in each area, and the information is useful to the referee wanting to know some things about Europe.

The second chapter covers the EC's organization and power blocs. Amidst a welter of inter-country political parties, the EC comes across like a combination of the British Parliament and a nonpolarized United Nations, complete with the behind-the-scenes calumny usually associated with US politics. Power corrupts, and the EC has plenty of power at its disposal, ranging from the mass-drivers on the lunar surface to the industrial wealth of its richest members. Fortunately

for the world of *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0*, the EC is more interested in money matters—i.e., who gets the cash and where, and what favors they trade for it—than nationalism. A truly united Europe would provoke the other world powers, the United States and Japan, into an apocalyptic world war that would range off-planet.

However, economics rules the EC. Seats on the council are awarded according to economic prowess. The industrial giant of Unified Germany rules the council through virtue of having more money than anyone else, and historical fear of Germany has factionalized the council. (The new Germany has done nothing to deserve fear; its armed forces are about the size of those of the other major European countries. Curiously, Britain's military rules gives it Europe's largest standing force.)

Interpol, the police force of the EC, is given quite a lot of space and interest (naturally, since PCs in Europe are more likely to run afoul of Interpol than any other legal agency).

Life in Europe covers the life-styles of the rich and famous, as well as those of the poor and heinous. As usual, European streets produce fashion from the over-expensive creations of Parisian clothiers to the new punk waves from England, fashions spilling over from mere appearance to the way you live and act.

One of these new fashions is new terrorism. Reactionary groups have long been popular in Europe. Corporate pressures, the bland command of EC controls, hopelessness and poverty turn people to anger and violence. Ecoterrorists strike at the polluting corporates. Revolutionary councils rise against restrictive government. Factions fight one another for control. A combination of 1990s Europe and the old French custom of *Jacquerie* (or "you too can be a revolting peasant").

Think you've got your role down? The best runner on the street or the toughest grunt? Get ready to go to night school—things are different in Europe. Smoother. Classier. More restricted. The anarchic free-market style of the United States has no place here. It doesn't matter who you are, what you are, or what you know. It's definitely who you know and whose name you can drop. Forget any egalitarian notions—working in the EC area is like living inside a big, snobby corp. Where competence still means something, but not as much as the ability to make friends and influence people (kissing and boot licking). A real change for gunslinger streetrunners fresh from the US. Why, if you betray your non-European ori-

gins in the least, the natives will treat you with all the courtesy and friendliness usually ascribed to French treatment of tourists. James Bond instead of the Terminator.

EVALUATION

The entire book is sprinkled with little tidbits of popular and incidental information, like European slang, quotes from public sources, etc. These add considerable color to the dry text, and some are really quite useful.

The adventures are good introductions to Eurostyle. The first, "Welcome to New Europe," literally injects the PCs into Europe, where the referee can chuckle and cackle as the predominantly American punks try to pull their usually bluster and bravado in the middle of civilization. The other adventures follow up this one, tied together by a middleman (absolutely essential in Europe—free-lancers aren't wanted, and adverts are *verboten*).

I have to admit that *Eurosource* is quite useful and is a fairly good product! For the *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0* referee trying to run something in Europe, it's essential.

I must mention the artwork. It is remarkably poor—in no way up to R. Talsorian's usual standards. When I first read *Eurosource*, the art put me off so much that I developed a dislike for the book. My critique of the text for this review has changed my opinion.

Unfortunately, a few buyers are likely to look at a product in the store with a critical eye. Art makes a vital first impression, and this book's first impression is not good.

The bottom line: If you want to find out about Europe in *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0*, or want to run adventures there, ignore the bad art and buy this book.

Corporation Report 2.0.2.0. Arasaka and IEC

R. Talsorian Games. \$10.00.

Written by William Moss.

88-page corporate sourcebook for *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0*.

The world of the future is a corporate holding. Even today, this tendency is present, as corporations get away with murder, and a single CEO decision alters the lives of thousands—or even millions. *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0* gives some small information on the corporations of this dark future, but only the bare essentials.

Corporation Report 2.0.2.0 is the first in a series of overviews detailing specific corporations, answering a wide variety of questions. Corporate histories, agendas, rulers, shakers and movers, policies, employees, equipment—all these are presented for two of the world's largest corporations.

Reviews by
Craig Sheeley

ARASAKA

The first and foremost is Arasaka—the nasties that most PCs will cross at some time. Arasaka is a vast corporation with a heavy emphasis on security services (security is by no means Arasaka's only focus—just its most visible). Arasaka handles the bulk (over 70%) of "rent-a-cop" security worldwide. The implications are chilling—Arasaka may provide good watchmen, but who watches the watchmen? The result is that very little happens that Arasaka Saburo (last name first), the founder and official CEO of Arasaka, doesn't learn about.

Saburo's circle of important people is also presented—his son and heir apparent, Kei; his young daughter, Hanako; his rebel son, Yorinobu; director of security Takayama Shintaro; and up-and-coming assistant security director Iwashima Jatsuo. These people are given short personality profiles, motives and game statistics. The PCs may well end up encountering some of these people in person, so the stats are vital.

Equipment is presented—some of Arasaka manufacture, some just used by Arasaka employees. And Arasaka corporation's goals, tactics, habits and market strategies are revealed in full. There's even a section on how to referee Arasaka involvement, plus a short adventure dealing with some dirty work for Yorinobu.

Some nifty computer-generated maps are provided for the adventure—the PCs are dealing with some high-level skulking! Maps of Arasaka's Hoshu R&D facility and Arasaka Saburo's house are also included.

IEC

International Electric Corporation (IEC) is a German-based general electronics manufacturing firm with fingers extended into almost every electric pie around the world, into orbit and all the way to the moon. Who do you think manufactured the electronics for the Tycho mass-drivers that hold the earthbound powers at bay? Or the electric coffeepot that you used this morning? Of the remote control to your vid and possibly the vid-set itself? Or the chips in your brain.

IEC started as a small Berlin electronics firm, but rose to power through truly ruthless acquisition tactics during the recession of 1997-98. When the dust settled, IEC turned into a major world power, naturally tied to the strong United Germany economy. A leading metal manufacturer, IEC is better known for its all-pervasive consumer electronics. Its stranglehold on specialty electronics is less well-known; it's a rare piece of hardware that doesn't include at least some sort of electronic component made by IEC.

This sets the Berliners up in a curious (by *Cyberpunk* standards) situation: IEC has

little bad blood with the other corporations seeking to rule the world (or at least their corner of the market). If IEC gets snubbed, it can withdraw its services and products from the offender.

IEC's moves are more subtle and less personal than Arasaka's. Still, IEC's sneaky goals and business tactics may well involve PCs. A short mini-adventure introduces adventurers to some of the people who hate IEC, as well as featuring a truly warped posergang which has chosen the SNL Coneheads as role models!

GOOD AND BAD

This series of books is a wonderful idea. R. Talsorian Games may not publish the vast amounts of support material that FASACranks out for *Shadowrun*, but its material is usually of higher information quality. With the information in this book, a referee can start involving his PCs in higher levels of corporate intrigue, because now he knows how these two particular corps act and think, and where they're going. A *Cyberpunk* game can rise above the streets and into the boardrooms, where

brains and cool count for more than a fast gun.

Some of the information may be a bit dry for most gamers, and some referees may have to struggle through the sections on corporate intents and policies. In addition, some of the artwork is really substandard.

If you run *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0*, this series of books is an excellent investment. The next book in the series details Lazarus Group and Militech. Ω

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NEED PLAYERS of *Dark Conspiracy*, *Cyberpunk* or any Palladium game (*Rifts* is okay but hard to run). Have experienced GM. Write to Nick Christenson, 2191 Spinning Wheel, Cincinnati, OH 45244. (61)

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PLAYERS WANTED for a *Living Steel* play-by-mail game. Swords and Alpha team members are needed to secure a base of power on the planet Rhand. For information, please send a SASE to David Peters, 5422 Pine Glen Road, La Crescenta, CA 91214. (60)

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HISTORY OF THE IMPERIUM WORKING GROUP (HIWG) is a *Traveller* club spanning from Australia to Finland, active in *Traveller* development. Members receive the bimonthly *Tiffany Star* newsletter. Write to Ed Edwards, 1410 E. Boyd, Norman, OK 73071. (54)

WRITER would like to contact players and designers for history of the hobby. Older players, second-generation gamers and women are of particular interest. Write to J. Cambias, 18 Georgetown Ct., Durham, NC 27705. (54)

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Please contact Peter Wimmer at 2646 Champlain Ave., Tempe, AZ 85281. (54)

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COPY OF THE *Near Star List* (all pages) from 2300 AD. Also *Atlas of the Imperium* and *MegaTraveller Journal 1*. Will pay reasonable price or trade MTJ 2, *MT World Builders' Handbook* or copies of articles from JTAS (5-24) or *Challenge* (25+). David Johnson, 11150 Beamer Road #291, Houston, TX 77089. (56)

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Challenge 62

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Silence is Golden (Merc: 2000)	4.0
Demon Dark (MegaTraveller)	4.0
Wolfspout (MegaTraveller)	3.5
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